

TIRED
OF THE
HUSTLE



JOURNEY CHURCH

journeyconnect.org

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	iv
DEVOTIONAL	1
WEEK ONE.....	1
Day 1	2
Day 2.....	4
Day 3.....	6
Day 4.....	8
Day 5.....	10
Day 6.....	12
WEEK TWO	15
Day 7.....	16
Day 8.....	18
Day 9.....	20
Day 10.....	22
Day 11.....	24
Day 12.....	26
Day 13.....	28
WEEK THREE	31
Day 14.....	32
Day 15.....	34
Day 16.....	36
Day 17.....	38
Day 18.....	40
Day 19.....	42
Day 20.....	44

WEEK FOUR	47
Day 21	48
Day 22	50
Day 23	52
Day 24	54
Day 25	56
Day 26	58
Day 27	60
WEEK FIVE	63
Day 28	64
Day 29	66
Day 30	68
Day 31	70
Day 32	72
Day 33	74
Day 34	76
WEEK SIX	79
Day 35	80
Day 36	82
Day 37	84
Day 38	86
Day 39	88
Day 40	90
FINAL WORD	92
CONTRIBUTORS	93
REFERENCES	94

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Tired of the Hustle, a 40-day journey designed to help you step away from the exhausting demands of proving your worth and step into the peace Jesus offers. In a world where we are constantly told our value comes from what we do and how much we achieve, it's no surprise that we feel weary, overwhelmed, and tired of the hustle. But what if there's a better way to live? What if the life Jesus offers us frees us from the constant pressure to prove, perform, and measure up?

As we approach Easter, the time when we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, it's the perfect moment to reflect on what He truly accomplished for us. During the next 40 Days, we will explore the deep truth that our identity, worth, and security are not something we have to hustle for; they are already given to us through Christ.

I believe these next 40 days can completely transform your life. Though there is nothing magical about the number, the Bible reveals God considers 40 days to be a spiritually significant period of time in which people are transformed. In fact, in the Bible, any time God wanted to get His people ready to be used mightily for Him, He took 40 days to prepare them.

If you are faithful and journey with us during these next 40 days, I know God will bring the Gospel to life. You are heading towards an encounter with the living God that will overwhelm you with more joy, engulf you with more hope, and astonish you with more love than you have ever known before. But like any journey, in order to follow Christ, you have to take some faith steps.

I am asking you to commit to the following faith steps as we go through this 40 Day journey together:

Participate in all six weekend worship experiences. Each week, the sermons will examine what it means to accept the invitation to follow Christ.

Read the daily readings in the 40 Days devotional. Set aside about 15 minutes at the same time each day to read the text, think about the principles, and allow God to change you as you gain a deeper understanding of Him. Every relationship takes time. Your relationship with Christ is no exception. Guard this time.

Join with others to discuss the week's teachings. True transformation never happens alone, but by challenging each other to seek hard after God. If you are not currently in a small group, you can join one of our 40 Days Short-Term Groups. Visit journeyconnect.org/groups to find out more.

Memorize a simple Bible verse each week from the 40 Days devotional that will help you focus on accepting Jesus' invitation. Each week you will be given a weekly Bible verse to memorize that fits the theme of the week. Write this verse down and hang it someplace where you will constantly see it. This will help you memorize and meditate on the verse throughout the week. Memorizing scripture may seem like a challenge, but I encourage you to take this opportunity to grow deeper in your walk with God through this key spiritual habit.

Sacrifice just one thing during the next 40 Days as a statement to yourself and to God of your commitment to follow Him. Sacrifice helps you to clearly focus on God and allows Him the opportunity to really work in your life. This means that for 40 Days, you will give up something from your everyday life occupies your time in order to free you to spend that time with God.

You never feel more satisfied than when you are walking in God's purpose for your life. My prayer is over the next 40 days, God will use His Holy Spirit, His Word, the community of small groups, and this devotion to show you what it means to follow His calling for your life.

In Christ,

Pastor James Hilton

week one

THE HUSTLE TO PROVE YOURSELF

MEMORY VERSE

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20 NIV

Life can feel like a constant competition to prove your worth. Whether it's striving for success, building the right connections, or keeping up socially, you're always under pressure to show you're capable. Yet, no matter how hard you try, it never feels like enough. The harder you hustle, the more drained and stressed you become, and you're left questioning if you're measuring up.

The truth is your worth doesn't come from how well you perform or what you achieve. Your identity is secure in what Jesus has already done for you. This week, we're looking at how the hustle to prove yourself only leads to burnout or pride. Jesus invites you to step off that exhausting treadmill. Your significance isn't based on your accomplishments or status; it's rooted in Him. You don't have to keep hustling to prove yourself. Rest in the confidence of who you are in Christ and let go of the pressure to measure up. You're already fully accepted in Him.

DAY ONE

WHY THE HUSTLE?

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Matthew 11:28-30

You know that feeling — the one that keeps you up at night, nagging at you, telling you you're not doing enough? You push through the day, juggling tasks, trying to meet expectations, but deep down, you wonder if it will ever be enough. It's like running a race where the finish line keeps moving, no matter how fast you go. That's the hustle, the relentless pressure to prove yourself, to earn your worth through what you achieve and how others see you.

But why the hustle? What are we really chasing?

Hustling is more than working hard or staying busy. It's the constant, often exhausting effort to feel worthy, gain approval, or prove we matter. It's the belief that if we push harder, look better, achieve more, or impress the right people, we'll finally be enough. It's not just about what's on our calendar; it's about what's going on in our heart. The hustle convinces us our worth is tied to what we do.

Maybe you don't see yourself as someone who hustles, but consider this: How often do you feel the need to prove yourself? How often do you compare your life to others? How often do you have that nagging feeling that you're just not good enough? If this sounds familiar, you're caught in the hustle — and chances are, you're exhausted from it.

The hustle looks different for everyone. For some, it's the endless grind of trying to finally be successful, working long hours, never feeling like it's enough. For others, it's the need to please people, constantly bending over backwards to meet others' expectations. Some of us hustle online, chasing likes, comments, and validation to feel seen and valued.

But the hustle doesn't stop there. For many, it even creeps into our spiritual lives. We think we need to hustle for God's approval, constantly doing more and trying harder to somehow earn His love.

The hustle is a lie. It makes us believe that if we just keep pushing, we'll eventually find the peace and satisfaction we crave. But no matter how much we hustle, it's never enough. There's always more

to do, another goal to hit, another person to impress. And each time we think we're close, the finish line moves further away.

At its core, hustling is driven by fear — that we're not enough, that we'll be rejected, or that if we stop, we'll lose our worth. We hustle because we're afraid that without it, we'll never be truly loved, accepted, or valuable.

But here's the good news: Jesus offers something completely different. In Matthew 11:28, He invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He knows the hustle has worn us out and His invitation is simple: Come and rest.

What Jesus offers isn't just a temporary break from busyness. He offers rest for your soul. It's freedom from the need to prove yourself. The rest Jesus gives is about laying down the belief that your worth is something you must earn.

We hustle because we're chasing something Jesus has already secured for us. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus accomplished everything we need to be loved, accepted, and valued by God. Our identity and worth aren't tied to what we do but to what He's done.

So, why do we hustle? Because we believe the lie that our worth depends on how well we perform. But the truth is our worth isn't something we have to hustle for. Jesus has already done the work. He's already declared we are enough. He's already secured our value in God's eyes.

The Hustle Stops Here: Are you running on empty, worn out from trying to prove your worth through what you do? Are you tired of running and never feeling like you're getting anywhere? Jesus invites you to stop. He invites you to let go of the hustle of trying to prove who you are and rest in who you are in Him.

As you reflect today, ask yourself: In what areas am I hustling? Where are you striving for approval or validation? In what area of life do you feel like a failure? Jesus is inviting you to trust what He has done is enough. You don't need to keep running yourself into the ground to prove your worth.

Prayer: Lord, help me to rest in what you have done for me, knowing that I don't need to prove my worth through what I do but that I am already enough in You. I'm letting go of the need to hustle and trust in the peace and security You've already provided.

DAY TWO

THE PRESSURE TO PROVE BY PASTOR JADNER LUGO

Read 2 Chronicles 26:1-23

As a huge sports fan, there are few things more thrilling than those final moments when the pressure is on for a big game. The clock is ticking, time is running out, and everything is on the line. Imagine your favorite quarterback under the spotlight, dropping back to make that one crucial throw to lead the team to the Super Bowl. The stakes are sky-high; every second matters. But now, imagine if that same quarterback, with no real pressure to make a move, scrambles and makes a reckless throw across his body into triple coverage. The interception is devastating. The opportunity for victory slips away, and what could have been a moment of triumph turns into a costly mistake. There was no need for the risk, but now he and his entire team must face the consequences of a gamble gone wrong.

I often see similar moments play out at home as a father of two young daughters. My youngest daughter, eager to feel independent, tries to fill her own water cup without any help. She wants to prove she can do it on her own. The outcome? Water all over herself and the kitchen. Whether you're a quarterback trying to make a big play or a toddler wanting to prove she's capable, the pressure to prove yourself often leads to a mess.

The motivation to prove yourself can come from different places. For some, it's the need to show they're not worthless. For others, it's an attempt to make sure people see them as better than they're perceived. Either way, it often ends in exhaustion or a distorted self-image. Even the best of us can fall into this trap. You could be doing amazing things for God and still feel that pressure to prove yourself. Sadly, that's exactly what happened to King Uzziah.

Uzziah, from the lineage of David, was poised to be one of Judah's greatest kings. He took the throne at a young age and chose to put God at the center of his kingdom. His obedience led to prosperity; his riches, power, and wisdom were renowned across the ancient world. God's hand of favor was on him, and his people benefited greatly from his leadership, making technological advances that were unheard of in those times. Everything was going well. Uzziah was

“marvelously helped” by God, and all he had to do was not mess it up. But that’s exactly what happened.

With his rising success, Uzziah’s heart became proud. He felt pressured to push the limits and cross boundaries he wasn’t meant to cross. His identity became wrapped up in his accomplishments and power. His desperation to hold on to his success led to his downfall. Instead of staying grounded in the God who helped him, he fell into pride. The once-great king ended up alone, his body afflicted with leprosy, his legacy tainted, and his people ashamed.

Uzziah’s pride led him away from the purpose God had for him. He forgot who had blessed him in the first place. He was exhausted from trying to keep proving himself. The truth is exhaustion and desperation are never worth the cost of compromising your identity to maintain success.

You don’t need to be a king to get caught in this trap. As human beings, it’s easy to place our identity in what we do rather than in who we are in Christ. We feel the need to prove ourselves at work by working long hours or by trying to impress others. We compromise our values in relationships or try to gain validation by bending over backward for others. But Jesus offers us a better way.

You don’t need to prove yourself to anyone. You only need to remember who you are because of what Jesus has done for you. You are forgiven, chosen, loved, adopted, set apart, redeemed, and blessed. Jesus has already proven your worth through His sacrifice. You don’t need to defend yourself or keep hustling to validate your value. Jesus has already given that to you.

Before you try to prove yourself by striving to do more, know more, or achieve more, remember Jesus just wants to be with you. He offers you an invitation to relieve the pressure and build a deep relationship with Him.

The Hustle Stops Here: Take time right now to thank Jesus for dying for you and remind yourself that you are marvelously helped, forgiven, redeemed, chosen, and loved by God. You don’t have to prove anything; Jesus already did that for you.

DAY THREE

THE LIE BEHIND THE HUSTLE

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Romans 1:18-25

We live in a world that constantly tells us we need to hustle— to earn more, do more, and be more. But the hustle never delivers. It leaves us exhausted, broken, and wondering why we never seem to measure up. The hustle is rooted in something deeper than our schedules and tasks; it's tied to the most ancient problem of all: sin.

Hustling was never part of God's plan for our lives. In the beginning, His design was for us to live in perfect harmony with Him, experiencing fullness, peace, and abundant life in His presence. There was no need for striving or self-sufficiency. But everything changed when Adam and Eve believed Satan's lie that life could be found apart from God. They chose their own way, and in doing so, they lost the true-life God intended. Death entered, and so did the hustle.

This same lie fuels every hustle today. We turn to creation instead of the Creator, hoping success, approval, relationships, or possessions will fill the void inside us. We convince ourselves that if we just work hard enough, we'll finally feel fulfilled. But Romans 1:18-25 reveals the painful truth: When we exchange God's truth for a lie, we end up serving things we were never meant to serve.

Sin isn't just breaking rules, it's about trying to live life apart from God. It's pushing Him aside and saying, "I can do this on my own." Sound familiar? That's the heart of the hustle — this constant striving to find life and worth on our terms, in our strength.

Like Adam and Eve, we fall into the trap of believing something in creation will give us the life we crave. This is where the hustle takes hold. We chase after these things, convinced they will satisfy, but in doing so, we turn away from the One who can give us life. The result? We become enslaved by the very things we seek.

That's why the hustle leaves us feeling broken, exhausted, and trapped. The hustle is our attempt to fill a void only God can fill. We trade God's truth for the lie that something else can give us the worth we crave. Driven by sin — a cruel master that always demands more but never delivers — we strive harder, but it's never enough. Sin deceives us into thinking that doing more and getting more will

finally satisfy us, but it creates an endless cycle of effort without rest.

Sin is not just an action; it's a supernatural force that enslaves and robs us of life. As James 1:15 says, "After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Sin brings spiritual death, a separation from God Himself. "Your iniquities have separated you from your God," says Isaiah 59:2. The consequence of sin is separation from God — being cut off from the One who created us to find life in relationship with Him. We may be physically alive, but without connection to God, we are spiritually disconnected and living in emptiness.

This sounds bleak, and it is. Sin has separated us from God, and no amount of hustling can fix it. All we're doing is running further from God, deeper into exhaustion, and the shackles of sin just get tighter, strangling life out of us. At the heart of the hustle is rebellion, our attempt to live without God, to make life work on our terms.

But that's not the end of the story. God didn't leave us in our separation. Into the darkness of our sin, the light of the world has come. Jesus entered our brokenness to bring us back to God. What sin destroyed; Jesus came to restore.

Jesus offers the way back to God, but for us to live, He had to die. Through His sacrifice, Jesus bridges the gap our sin created and brings us back into relationship with the God who gives life.

The Hustle Stops Here: Take a hard look at your life today. In what areas are you exhausted from the hustle that will never satisfy? What is breaking you down, leaving you empty and disconnected from God? The hustle is more than just striving; it's rooted in sin — turning away from God and seeking life in things that can never truly satisfy. Ask God to reveal where you've turned away and what you're hustling after. The first step back to Him is recognizing where you've been hustling for what only He can provide. Let today be the day the hustle stops, and surrender begins.

DAY FOUR

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PROVE YOURSELF
— JESUS IS ENOUGH.

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Titus 3:3-7

The hustle to prove yourself runs deeper than ambition; it's rooted in sin, the sin that separates us from God. The Bible teaches that apart from Jesus Christ, we're not just hustling through life—we're spiritually dead. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1: "You were dead in your trespasses and sins."

Sin isn't just about mistakes; it's rebellion against God. It's rejecting Him, saying, "I've got this. I can do life on my own." That's the heart of the hustle: striving to prove ourselves, trying to find life and worth apart from God. But this leads only to spiritual death—a separation from God, the true source of life.

Sin creates an unbridgeable gap between us and God. It's not just breaking rules; it's a destructive force leaving us empty. Paul says we were "by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)," deserving God's judgment. No matter what we do, we can't bridge this gap.

But here's the good news: God didn't leave us spiritually dead. Despite our striving, God, in His mercy, made a way. "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy (Titus 3:4–5)." It's not by our works but by God's mercy we are saved.

That's why Jesus, fully God and fully man, stepped into our brokenness to do what we couldn't. He came not just to teach but to rescue us from sin's cycle. Jesus lived the perfect life we couldn't and bore our sins on the cross. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... by his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24)."

On the cross, Jesus bridged the gap between us and God. He took the punishment we deserved, experiencing separation from God so we wouldn't have to. Through His death, He made it possible to stop hustling for worth and find life in Him.

We don't have to prove ourselves anymore because Jesus already did the work. His sacrifice restores our relationship with God, giving us direct access to Him.

But knowing this isn't enough. God calls us to stop hustling and respond with repentance and faith. Repentance means turning from sin, the hustle keeping us from God. Faith means turning to Christ, believing He alone can save us. "Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21)."

Faith isn't just knowing about Jesus; it's trusting Him for salvation. You stop striving and trust in what Jesus has done. As John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

When we turn from the hustle and embrace Christ, we experience new life. This requires a personal response—an invitation to trust in the finished work of Jesus.

The Hustle Stops Here: If you've been hustling to prove yourself, today is the day to stop. You don't need to keep striving for what Jesus already provided. He offers you life, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God. All you need to do is respond with repentance and faith.

If you feel God calling you to stop the hustle and receive Jesus as your Savior, you can do that now with a simple prayer: Dear God, forgive my sins. I believe Jesus is Lord, that He died on the Cross for my sins, and that You raised Him from the dead. I repent of my sins and trust in Jesus alone for my salvation. I give my life to You. Thank You for the gift of eternal life through Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

It's always incredibly encouraging to hear from those who have accepted Jesus' invitation and received the gift of salvation. If you've made that decision today, we'd love to hear from you. Email me at PastorJamesHilton@journeyconnect.org. We'd love to personally encourage, support, and pray for you.

DAY FIVE

DITCH THE GRIND AND EMBRACE YOUR TRUE WORTH

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Galatians 2:19-20

For much of my life, I hustled to prove my worth. I felt like my value was tied to how well I performed or how people perceived me. Approval and success made me feel validated, but it never lasted long. Soon, self-doubt would creep in, and I'd question if I were enough. So, I pushed harder, hoping the next achievement would finally bring satisfaction, but it never did. The finish line kept moving, and I was left feeling exhausted, empty, and wondering why I couldn't find rest.

Deep down, I felt like a failure. Maybe you've felt the constant pressure to prove yourself, too. It's exhausting. But what if your worth isn't something you have to chase or earn? The truth that changed everything for me is this: In Jesus Christ, my identity is secure, and so is yours. We don't need to hustle to prove our value because Jesus has already done the work.

When our identity is secure in Christ, we're no longer defined by what we do or what happens to us. Instead, we are defined by who God says we are. In Christ, God declares we are always loved, valued, and accepted, no matter our successes or failures. Unlike the world's shifting standards, God's love and approval never change. He remains constant, and so does our worth in Him, providing us with a foundation that is unshakable and secure.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says God chose us in Christ before the world began. This means our worth isn't based on our actions and can't be taken away by our mistakes. God's love for us is constant, unaffected by performance. This was hard for me to understand at first because I was used to measuring my value by achievements, but realizing this truth changed everything.

God doesn't hold our failures against us. Through Jesus' sacrifice, every sin — past, present, and future — is forgiven. This is why we can stop hustling. Our identity is no longer based on what we do but on what Christ has already done for us. We aren't just partially loved; we are fully loved.

When we place our faith in Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. John 1:12 says, "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." As God's children, we are no longer defined by the world's standards of success or failure but by God's unconditional love.

Think of a loving parent nurturing and caring for their child. That's how God sees you. He isn't distant; He deeply cares about every detail of your life. You don't have to earn His love or prove your worth. He already calls you His beloved child.

As God's child, you have an unbreakable bond with Him. Your identity isn't just a title; it's a relationship that transforms your life. God has promised never to leave you. You don't have to fear being cast out because your place in His family is secured through Jesus.

Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." This means the old way of striving for approval is over. Now, we live from the love and acceptance God has already given us through Jesus.

Life will bring challenges — failure, rejection, disappointment — but none of these can take away our identity in Christ. We are secure in His love. In a world full of uncertainties, this truth is the one foundation that will never be shaken.

The Hustle Stops Here: If you're caught in the exhausting cycle of proving your worth, it's time to stop. In Christ, your worth has already been established. Reflect on these truths:

- *Rest in God's love: Meditate on the fact that you are fully loved and accepted in Christ without needing to earn it.*
- *Stop comparing: The world's standards are always changing, but God's love is constant. Live by His standards.*
- *Embrace your identity: Remind yourself daily that you are a child of God who is loved, forgiven, and secure in Him.*
- *Let go of perfectionism: Christ's sacrifice has already made you enough in God's eyes.*

When you live from the truth of who you are in Christ, the need to hustle fades.

DAY SIX

RETURN AND REST

BY TRICIA BULLEMAN

Read Isaiah 30:15 and Isaiah 32:17

Have you ever tried to hang a picture frame? I think there are two. Although she couldn't put it into words, the shy, 6-year-old girl already questioned her worth. Knees pressed against the back of the golden, velvety couch, her face turned toward the picture window, watching, waiting, hoping. Every car that approached the house made her heart race. Was this the one? Would this be her dad coming for her this time? The uncertainty was suffocating. Each approaching car held the promise that maybe today, she would be seen and loved by her dad. But often, even when he promised, her father didn't come. In those broken promises, a seed of doubt was planted deep in her heart, and so began her struggle with understanding her identity.

Because of her shaken confidence in her value, a pattern of striving to prove herself developed. The little girl realized she gained approval from adults through stellar behavior and academic accomplishments. Determined to prove she was worth something to someone, she placed her faith in her accomplishments, believing doing more would make her valuable. But no matter how many awards or "good girl" accolades she received, it still wasn't enough. She could never achieve perfection, even in the areas she excelled. And that's where she stayed, caught in an exhausting cycle, until one day, the Holy Spirit revealed her need to place her faith in Jesus rather than in her ability to prove her value. It wasn't automatic, though. Her desire to feel worthy often drove her to hustle to behave and accomplish. But as she grew in her relationship with Jesus, she learned to repent again and rest in being His.

As you've probably guessed, I was that little girl. Over the years, I have often found myself slipping back into the cycle of hustling to prove myself, while already having a secure identity in Jesus. Just like Isaiah pointed out about the Israelites, who placed their security in what the Egyptians could supply for them, I sometimes placed my confidence in my ability to earn security through what I could do. But the hustle always left me lacking and anxious. It kept me in bondage, while Christ promises freedom for those whose identity is found "in Him."

In the book of Galatians, we learn the gospel needs nothing from us. Faith, or trusting in Jesus, is our responsibility, but we cannot add anything to our salvation by doing works. The gospel is freedom from the hustle of doing and people-pleasing. Paul asks the rhetorical question, "For am I now trying to win the favor of people, or God (Galatians 1:10)?" Graciously, God gives us the antidote to the hustle of proving our worth. But as simple as it is, we often struggle to surrender to the remedy. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet teaches us the way to live in secure confidence, to be delivered from the drive "to do." He exhorts us to return (or repent) and rest. By returning to the purity of the gospel message, we are freed. The Good News is while we may feel like we're never enough, Christ is always enough. Trusting in Him makes us enough, no matter how we feel.

By returning to Christ's immeasurable demonstration of love to make us His, we repent of our drive to make ourselves something because we agree with God that we are already something in Him. And then we rest. We rest in the truth of who Christ is and all that He perfectly accomplished for us. We rest in the confidence that as we are in Him, He is in us (John 17:22-23). In Galatians 5, Paul charges us as believers, "Christ has liberated us into freedom. Therefore, stand firm, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The way to freedom is to return to God, repenting of the hustle to secure our worth. We rest in the freedom supplied through our identity in Christ. The hustle undermines what Christ has already done. The only way to live securely is to repent and rest in Christ's righteousness. By making a habit of returning and resting, we are changed. By repenting and resting, we are at peace with quieted hearts and minds. And then, we live free!

The Hustle Stops Here: Father, help me embrace the reality of my worth and identity in Jesus. Forgive me when I try to prove my value as if His sacrifice for me was not enough. Help me develop a pattern of repentance and rest every day so that I may be strengthened in Him.

week two

THE HUSTLE FOR MORE

MEMORY VERSE

“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Romans 8:31-32 NIV

We often believe that having more — more money, more possessions, more things — will finally bring us the security and fulfillment we long for. But the more we chase after these things, the more anxious and unsatisfied we become. The hustle for more never seems to end, leaving us feeling empty and exhausted.

This week, we’ll explore how the relentless pursuit of more can quietly dominate our lives, distracting us from what truly matters. For those who are tired of constantly striving, Jesus offers something radically different: a life that isn’t defined by the hustle for more, but by trusting in Him for our security and contentment.

He invites us to break free from the endless hustle and to experience a peace only He can bring, a security deeply rooted in God’s unfailing love, faithful care, and abundant provision.

It’s time to stop chasing after more and start living in the fullness of what God freely offers.

DAY SEVEN

THE HUSTLE TRAP: ESCAPING THE FEAR OF NOT ENOUGH

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Romans 8:31-32

I hate hurricane season. Not just because of the destruction, but because of how it affects people. Every time a storm is forecasted, panic sets in; store shelves are wiped clean of water, batteries, and toilet paper. The real issue isn't the storm but our overreaction of hoarding far more than we need. Where does this come from? Jesus had a name for it: greed.

Greed is a word we avoid. It seems harsh, but the hustle for more, whether for security, control, or comfort, is rooted in it. Jesus warned, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed (Luke 12:15, NIV)." Greed sneaks into our lives, disguised as responsibility or wisdom. It tells us that the more we have, the safer we'll be. But no matter how much we gain, the desire for more doesn't stop. Jesus warned more about greed than other sins because He knows our hearts and how easily greed can take over.

The truth is that greed is driven by fear. Fear of not having enough, fear of vulnerability, fear of missing out. It convinces us that having more will eliminate fear and provide security. That's why we hustle, filling our lives with things, believing they'll protect us from life's uncertainties and give us joy. But no matter how much we gather, it's never enough.

Jesus confronts this mindset: "Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15, NIV)." True protection, peace, and fulfillment aren't found in having more. Our worth and security come from our relationship with God, not from what we accumulate.

This doesn't mean God is against preparing for the future or enjoying nice things. There's nothing wrong with saving wisely or appreciating His good gifts. The issue lies in our hearts, when fear drives us to rely on things for security, instead of trusting God's provision. Believing more possessions will make us secure or fulfilled is the trap of greed Jesus warns about.

Breaking free from this cycle starts by understanding what God has already done for us. Scripture teaches that redemption — the price

for our restoration — was paid by Jesus. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:7, NIV).” Our worth and security don’t come from what we own but from the price Jesus paid for us.

When we rest in God’s immense love, knowing He gave His Son for us, our perspective shifts. We no longer need to hustle for more, because God has already provided all we need in Christ. Jesus, who had infinite wealth, gave it up for us. If He had held onto it, we’d still be in spiritual poverty. But in love, He sacrificed everything to buy us back. Our security is no longer about having more; it’s rooted in Christ’s redeeming work.

Paul writes, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32, NIV)” If God didn’t withhold His own Son, we can trust Him to provide all we need. Our security doesn’t come from accumulating more but from trusting in God’s faithfulness. His unshakable love and provision provide true security.

So why do we still hustle for more? Because we forget. We forget God is faithful. Greed, driven by fear, convinces us that we must secure everything ourselves. Yet, when we remember God is for us and has proven His love through the redeeming work of Jesus, we can rest in His provision.

The Hustle Stops Here: So, what more do you need? If God gave His Son for you, can anything else truly add to your security? Is there any amount of money, possessions, or control that could provide more assurance than the ultimate sacrifice God made for you? We chase after more, thinking it will make us feel safer, but nothing compares to the security of being loved and cared for by the God who gave everything for you.

Trusting in God breaks the cycle of fear-driven striving. It lets you release the endless hustle and rest in the security He has already secured through Jesus. If God is for you and Jesus has given His life to redeem you, you can trust God to graciously provide all you need. Today pray, Lord, I confess I often chase after more, thinking it will give me security. Help me to trust in Your provision and rest in all that You’ve already secured for me through Jesus. Amen.

DAY EIGHT

THE DRIVE TO ACCUMULATE

BY MARTIN PEDATA

Read Proverbs 23:4-5

Growing up as the child of parents who lived through the Great Depression, I learned the value of hard work and the pursuit of financial security from an early age. My parents, shaped by the hardships of that era, instilled in me a relentless work ethic and a deep sense of responsibility. From a young age, I watched them sacrifice and labor to ensure our family had what we needed. They knew what it meant to live with uncertainty, and they were determined to teach me how to navigate life with discipline, diligence, and self-sufficiency. Their resilience was not just about survival; it was about thriving, despite challenges, and it profoundly influenced my approach to life.

In third grade, my father and I started a small cleaning business together. The lessons I learned from that venture went far beyond just earning money. I learned the importance of responsibility, the value of a dollar, and the fulfillment of completing a task well. These early experiences shaped my worldview, and as I worked through high school, college, and law school, my priority was to ensure I could provide for myself and my future. The hustle to work hard and accumulate became deeply ingrained in me. I was driven to build a life where I could be independent and free from the financial struggles my parents had faced.

But as I reflect on those years of striving, I recognize a familiar tension: a drive rooted not just in responsibility, but in the fear of not having enough. This fear, passed down from my parents' experience of scarcity, fueled my relentless hustle for financial security. I believed that if I hustled hard enough and earned enough, I could control my future and shield myself from uncertainty and anxiety. This hustle, though well-intentioned, often left me feeling exhausted and disconnected from the peace that God promises. In the process, I became like the person warned about in Proverbs 23:4-5: "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness."

These verses remind us the pursuit of wealth is deceptive. We may believe hustling to accumulate more will bring us security, but riches are fleeting. Like an eagle that suddenly takes flight, wealth

can vanish just as quickly as it comes. When we trust in our ability to hustle and accumulate wealth, we rely on something unstable and unreliable. The world teaches us to chase after money, possessions, and success as if they are the keys to security and happiness, but God offers a different perspective. True security is found in trusting God and recognizing He is our ultimate source of provision.

This doesn't mean hard work is wrong. Scripture is clear that diligence is a virtue, and we are called to provide for our families and be responsible stewards of what God has given us. But there is a profound difference between hustling endlessly because we think our efforts alone will secure our future and working diligently as a response to God's calling. When we trust in our own cleverness and relentless hustle, we miss out on the peace and contentment that come from trusting in God's grace and loving provision. God's desire is for us to work faithfully, but also to rest in Him, knowing He is the One who truly sustains us.

The Hustle Stops Here: Take a moment to consider where your trust lies. Are you tempted to wear yourself out in the hustle for financial security, or are you learning to rest in God's provision? Are you focused on accumulating more, or are you allowing God to reshape your priorities? The invitation today is to realign your heart with God's perspective. Allow Him to give you the peace and contentment that come from trusting in Him rather than in the fleeting promises of wealth. God wants us to experience true freedom, a freedom that comes from knowing He will meet our needs and provide for us in every season.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for being our ultimate Provider and the Source of true security. Forgive us when we place our trust in what we can hustle to accumulate rather than in You. Help us release the fear of not having enough and rest in the assurance that You know our needs and will provide for us. Guide our hearts to seek Your kingdom first and to find contentment in Your presence. Teach us to trust in Your timing and Your ways, and let us experience the peace that comes from knowing You hold our future. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DAY NINE

GOD WILL PROVIDE

BY BRYCE WRIGHT

Read 1 Kings 17:1-16

In 1 Kings 17, we find Elijah living in a season of incredible drought. Up to this point, God has been providing water for Elijah through a nearby river and supplying him with food from ravens. However, the river finally succumbs to the drought and dries up, leaving Elijah without a water source. Then, God gives an interesting command. He tells Elijah to go to a nearby city, where he will find a widow who will provide him with food. As Elijah reaches the outskirts of the city, he finds the widow God told him about and asks her for a cup of water and a little bread.

To truly understand the power of what happens in verses 12-16, there are two details we need to know about the widow in this story.

First, widows were among the poorest individuals in the ancient world on any given day, much less in the middle of a drought. This particular widow's situation is so desperate that when Elijah meets her, she is gathering firewood for the last meal she and her son can eat before they run out of supplies and starve to death. If there was anyone who should not have been expected to be able to spare some food for Elijah, it was this woman!

Second, this widow was not an Israelite or a follower of God. How do we know that? Her response to Elijah in verse 12: "As surely as the Lord your God lives." She knew about God and that Elijah was a prophet of God, but she did not follow God. This small detail has enormous implications for this story. Not only does this widow not have enough food for her and her son to survive, but she also doesn't have a relationship with the God Elijah is claiming will provide for her needs. So why does she decide to trust the promise Elijah gives her? Because she's heard of what God can do.

In verse 14, Elijah doesn't give assurance based on his own ability to provide for the widow. Instead, he assures the widow this promise is from "the Lord, the God of Israel." Why would this detail matter to the widow if she is not a follower of God? There is evidence throughout the Old Testament that people from other nations heard about what

God had done for Israel. When He split the Red Sea and delivered Israel from Egypt, people heard about it. When He collapsed the walls of Jericho, people heard about it. At some point, this widow had heard about God's track record, whether it was from Elijah at this moment or from stories that other people shared, and that is why she took the incredible step of faith in verse 15.

She faced her impossible situation and thought, "I don't have enough to do what is being asked of me." Yet, she remembered God's track record: "I've heard of what the God of Israel can do, and I trust that if He makes a promise, He will deliver." And the result? God honored her remarkable faith, providing exactly as He had promised through Elijah.

The Hustle Stops Here: The hustle for more will always try to convince us that we need a little more before we feel ready to allow God to use what we have. We think we need just a bit more time in our week before we can serve. We need a slightly bigger house before we can host a life group. We need more experience as a believer before we can start sharing our faith with others. We need more money in the bank before we can trust God with our finances. But if the widow's story teaches us anything, it's that God's track record proves that when we stop hustling for more and instead offer Him what we already have, He always provides exactly what we need. God doesn't need us to have more, He simply needs us to trust Him with what we have.

This week, pray with open hands whenever you start to feel the hustle for more creeping in. Ask God to show you areas of your life where you are struggling to trust His track record, and then offer those areas to Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness and for always being our provider. Help us to trust You with what we have, even when it feels like it's not enough. Forgive us for the times we let fear drive us to hustle for more instead of resting in Your promises. Open our eyes to see where we need to trust You more deeply and give us the courage to step out in faith. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DAY TEN

I OWE, I OWE, OFF TO WORK I GO

BY PASTOR JUSTIN JAMES

Read Luke 16:10-13

It's difficult to escape the constant barrage of commercials, social media ads, and marketing campaigns designed to sell us something. If they do their job effectively, they don't just sell us a product; they convince us that happiness, fulfillment, and contentment are just one swipe or tap of the card away.

And for a while, it might feel that way, maybe for a few days or even a few weeks, if we're lucky. But soon we realize the purchase didn't deliver on its promises. Everything isn't magically better, family is still chaotic, work is still stressful, and those empty feelings remain. So, what do we do? We hop back on Amazon, visit the local car dealership, start scrolling on realtor.com, and repeat the hustle cycle all over again.

Here's how I know this hustle for more is real. According to debt.org, Americans owe \$986 billion on credit cards, \$11.92 trillion on mortgages, \$1.55 trillion on vehicle loans, and \$1.6 trillion for student loans. As a country, we've fallen for this trick hook, line, and sinker. Our national debt, the amount of money the U.S. federal government has borrowed, is currently \$35.4 trillion. If you wanted to write a check, that's \$35,400,000,000,000.00. That's a lot of zeros!

Not only is our quest for happiness not living up to the hype, but it's also hurting us. A recent survey reported 47% of U.S. adults say money has a negative impact on their mental health, leading to anxiety, stress, worrisome thoughts, loss of sleep, and even depression. Financial disagreements are also one of the leading causes of divorce.

The hustle for more has not only left us financially strained but spiritually empty. During His earthly ministry, Jesus taught extensively about the kingdom of God, the Father's love, and salvation. But interestingly, He also spoke about money more than almost any other topic. In fact, about one-third of His parables dealt with money and possessions, emphasizing the importance of how we handle our resources. Jesus knew our relationship with money has the power to shape our hearts, and He had a lot to say about money and the hustle

for more.

Jesus tells us if we can't handle what we currently have, we won't be given more. This principle goes beyond just money; it's a life lesson. If we struggle to show up to work on time and aren't helping our boss and company succeed, we can't expect more responsibility or a raise.

The hustle for more can cloud our vision, causing us to overlook the resources and opportunities that God has already placed in our lives. Managing our money is an act of worship, just as spiritual as singing praise on Sunday or reading this devotional. God calls us to stop hustling for more and instead, be faithful stewards of what we have been given. So, what does God want us to do with our money?

1. Return the Tithe: (10% of Your Income - Leviticus 27:30) God doesn't ask us to tithe because He needs anything from us. Tithing is about pointing our hearts toward God and stopping the hustle for more. As Matthew 6:21 says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." When we tithe, we practice making our lives less about ourselves and more about God's kingdom. How much of our money is really ours? None! We return to God what is already His and manage the rest.

2. Get on a Budget: Proverbs 21:5 says, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." Budgeting is simply making a plan for your money. It's a way to stop the hustle and bring intentionality to your finances. When you create a budget, you tell your money where to go instead of wondering where it went.

3. Get Out of Debt: Proverbs 22:7 says, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender." The hustle for more often leads us into debt, and God knew that debt could rule over us and ultimately destroy our lives. Getting out of debt takes discipline and intentionality, but it leads to financial freedom. The debt snowball method (popularized by Ramsey+) is an effective strategy to pay off debt from smallest to largest, freeing us from the cycle of hustle and debt.

The Hustle Stops Here: If you're tired of the hustle for more and want practical help, we host a class called Financial Peace University (FPU) several times a year, and we've prepaid for an online Ramsey+ Membership for you. Visit journeyconnect.org/ramseyplus for more details and to start your journey to financial peace.

DAY ELEVEN

TRUSTING GOD'S PROVISION

BY GRACYN HILTON

Read Philippians 14:19-20

Ever found yourself frantically asking, "Oh no, where are my keys?" One morning while rushing to work, I had that exact thought. I panicked and searched everywhere, turning the house upside down. I was sure I had lost them for good. Then, in a moment of pure irony, I reached into my back pocket, and there they were. The keys had been with me all along; I already had everything I needed!

Isn't that just like our walk with Christ? We spend so much time searching for love, worth, joy, hope, and acceptance thinking they are somewhere out there. We hustle endlessly, trying to fill the gaps, but end up feeling lost and empty, wondering if we'll ever be satisfied. But because of what Jesus did on the cross, we already have everything we need. Just like those keys, what we're searching for is already with us.

Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus." This verse shows us God's heart: He's a generous Provider, and His riches are limitless. Jesus has already secured everything for us through His sacrifice on the cross. We don't need to hustle to earn what God has freely given. Through the power of the Cross and the Holy Spirit in us, God has already equipped us with everything we need (2 Peter 1:3). His Word is alive, full of promises that never fail (Hebrews 4:12). Instead of trying to prove ourselves repeatedly, we are simply called to trust and receive what's already ours through Christ.

Instead of hustling for worth, we can rest in the truth that our worth comes from Him. Instead of striving for acceptance, we can hold onto the fact that God has already called us His own. Instead of chasing joy, we can find true joy in knowing the Creator of the universe. We don't need to hustle for what the world says will make us whole. We can rest securely in what God has already provided, knowing His promises are true. Let's take a closer look at some of these incredible promises God has already proclaimed over us.

God's Promises to You:

- God loves you deeply (Ephesians 2:4): God loves you so much that He sent His Son for you. There's nothing like the love of the Father.
- God calls you worthy (Luke 12:7): God knows every detail about you, even the number of hairs on your head. He cares for the sparrows, and you are worth far more to Him than a sparrow. You are His child, worthy for Him to send His Son.
- God fills you with His joy (John 15:11): The joy that comes from the Lord is unlike any other. It's rooted in Him. Knowing He is greater than anything we could imagine fills us with joy because we get to have a relationship with the Creator of the universe.
- God is your hope (Romans 15:13): Our hope isn't based on what's happening around us. Our hope is in the One who sent His Son for us, who died and rose again. We have hope for eternity and the promise of Jesus' return.
- God calls you accepted (1 John 3:1): We are God's children, adopted into His family. He calls us His sons and daughters. The God of the universe has accepted you, and He has a bigger plan and purpose for your life as you walk with Him.

Everything we need has already been provided by God. We don't need to hustle for approval or strive to fill our emptiness. We are free from that exhausting hustle because in Christ, we already have love, worth, joy, hope, and acceptance.

Sometimes it's hard to believe we truly have all we need. But as you keep pursuing the Lord, He shows you just how loved and welcomed you are through His kindness. Live glorifying Him, trusting His provision. I hold onto this promise: In every situation we face, the Lord's provision will cover us, and we can trust Him to help us through. Because the Lord's hand is over your life, you can stand confidently, knowing everything is secured in Him. Keep moving forward in Him, and let the God of all creation satisfy your soul. Today, stand confidently, knowing everything is secure.

The Hustle Stops Here: I challenge you to proclaim these truths over your life. Remind yourself that you already have everything you need. Stop striving, and rest in God's promises. Live for Him in every step, knowing everything you need is already secured in Jesus Christ.

DAY TWELVE

TRUE SECURITY IN GOD

BY CALEB BULLEMAN

Read Luke 12:15-21

I remember listening to a song I'd heard many times before, but this time, it hit differently. The song tells the story of a man receiving bad news that rattles his foundation. He realized he had ignored many important things, pouring himself into temporary pursuits like work, status, and fleeting pleasures. When the bad news came, he understood how empty it all was. He tried to change by spending more time with family, chasing experiences, and striving to be better. While these changes seemed good, he still missed the most important thing: his eternal relationship with God.

The man in the song thought investing in earthly things would fill the void, but those efforts fell short. Material things, experiences, and even relationships can never truly satisfy when we're missing the most crucial relationship: the one with God. Without Him, there's no real hope.

This reminds me of a story in Luke's Gospel. A man asked Jesus to make his brother divide their inheritance. On the surface, it seemed like a simple request for fairness. But Jesus looked deeper and gave a warning: "Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15)." The real issue wasn't the inheritance, it was the man's heart. Like many of us, he tried to control his circumstances and find security in possessions.

Jesus then shares a parable about a rich man blessed with a great harvest. His barns were already full, so he decided to tear them down and build bigger ones to store the excess. He thought he could secure his future and take it easy. But God called him out: "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? (Luke 12:20)" Jesus makes a powerful point: Chasing possessions is pointless if we neglect our relationship with God.

This teaching isn't just about money; it's about what we rely on for security and fulfillment. Often, we hustle to accumulate more, whether it's wealth, recognition, experiences, believing these things will bring us peace. But Jesus makes it clear that nothing we accumulate can

substitute for the security that comes from trusting God. When our trust is misplaced, we end up exhausted, chasing something that was never meant to satisfy us.

In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus teaches us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus says when we focus on earthly treasures, our hearts will always be restless. True peace comes from storing up treasures in heaven, investing in things with eternal value.

What if instead of focusing on what we have and how we can use it, we focused on Who gave it to us? The issue wasn't the man's wealth; it was his misplaced trust. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:31-33 not to worry about what we'll eat or wear but to seek God's kingdom first. When we do that, God promises to meet all our needs. He calls us to trust Him with everything and not to worry about tomorrow.

In my own life, there have been times I've gotten this right and times I've fallen short. But when Jesus is at the center of my decisions, whether financial, professional, or relational, He always provides. He always makes a way. Sometimes, His provision stretches my faith. There have been moments when the situation felt hopeless, but God always came through when I put my faith in His plan. We can fill our lives with things that bring temporary comfort, but without true dependence on God, it all leads to emptiness. True security is only found in Jesus.

The Hustle Stops Here: We need to ask ourselves: What are we hustling for? Are we hustling for security in things that can vanish, or are we seeking the kingdom of God, trusting He will provide? When we put God first, we find He is more than enough. He becomes our Provider, our Sustainer, and the One who fills the void nothing else can.

Start by thanking God for His provision and goodness in every season. Ask Him what investing in His kingdom looks like for you during these 40 days and beyond. Finally, pray for an open heart and for protection from the enemy as you take steps toward trusting God's will for your life.

DAY THIRTEEN

HOW MUCH MORE?

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Matthew 7:7-11

The word “more” may be small, but it carries a lot of weight in our lives. It’s a craving that drives us to hustle, always chasing after something better. You see it in a child throwing a tantrum. It shows up in the insecurity we feel, no matter how much we have, or the fear of missing out when scrolling through social media. Even when life seems good, something inside still whispers “more.”

This craving pushes us to do things we wouldn’t normally do. We work harder, hoard, and chase after what we think will fill the void. Yet, no matter how much we get, the voice still demands for more. We think our hustle for more, whether it’s for security, control, or comfort, will bring satisfaction.

Jesus warns that our hustling for more can lead us down a dangerous path. It’s driven by fear and our fears reveal something deep. Every fear reveals how we view God.

Jesus didn’t just come to restore our relationship with God, He came to correct how we see Him. Jesus often referred to God as “Father,” wanting us to understand our Creator is not distant but a loving, attentive Father who cares for us.

When Jesus asks, “How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?” He’s inviting us to stop and reflect. It’s not just rhetorical; it’s a chance to consider the depth of God’s love and provision. It’s an invitation to stop the hustle and to rest in Him.

As a father, I know I’m not perfect. Sometimes I lose patience or get frustrated with my kids. But despite my flaws, I love my children and want to give them good things. If I, as an imperfect dad, can love and provide for my kids, how much more will our perfect Father in Heaven care for us?

Look at your life. Where are you still hustling, thinking more money, a better opportunity, or the next new thing will make you feel secure? But Jesus flips this thinking. He challenges us with “how much more?” It’s a call to imagine how much more God, with His infinite love, wants

to give us. He not only meets our needs but longs to bless us beyond what we can imagine.

If God didn't withhold His own Son, the most precious gift, why would He hold back anything else we truly need? If God gave His best for us, how much more can we trust that He'll provide in every other area of life? This question exposes the futility of our striving.

When we live in fear, we're saying our security depends on us. But Jesus reminds us our Father is more than enough. So, what more could you need when God is on your side? If we truly believe He is for us, the hustle for more can stop.

The hustle for more always stems from fear we won't have enough. This fear drives us to hold tightly to what we have, believing our security lies in accumulating more. But Jesus invites us to trust something greater: our Father's heart. When we see how much more God loves us and how valuable we are to Him, we can finally let go of the hustle.

Jesus wanted one truth to be very clear: God loves to show He is our Provider and can be trusted. He tells us not to worry, reminding us He knows our needs and will meet them if we trust Him. True security isn't in having more; it comes from knowing and trusting God as the Source of "more."

We will never open our hands to release what we cling to until we see how much more God wants to do for us. Jesus wants us to stop hustling for more and live with open hands, trusting that our Father delights in providing for us. Security doesn't come from what we do, but from trusting in how much more God wants to do because He loves us.

The Hustle Stops Here: In what areas are you still hustling for more? Do you struggle to believe God will provide for your needs? Jesus calls us to stop striving and rest in the assurance that our Father loves to give us good things.

Lord, help me trust in Your goodness and provision as my Father. I confess I often hustle for more, thinking it will give me security. Open my eyes to see how much more You want to give me because I am loved by You. Teach me to rest in Your care and live with open hands, trusting that You are a good Father who will provide everything I need.

week three

THE HUSTLE TO MEASURE UP

MEMORY VERSE

“Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ”

Philippians 3:7-8 NIV

Have you ever felt that no matter how much you accomplish, it's never enough? In a world that constantly pushes us to hustle harder, strive higher, and measure up to impossible standards, it's easy to feel exhausted and empty. This relentless pursuit of success can leave us feeling like our lives aren't making the impact or carrying the significance we hoped for. But what if success isn't about what we achieve, but about what's already been done for us?

This week, we'll explore how Jesus offers true fulfillment—not through our efforts toward success, but through His finished work. Let's dive into God's Word to discover the freedom of resting in His grace and finding our worth in Him. Join us as we uncover what it truly means to let go of the hustle and embrace the life He has already made complete.

DAY FOURTEEN

THE HUSTLE TO MEASURE UP |

WHAT DO YOU VALUE?

BY PASTOR JOHN SELLERS

Read Philippians 3:4-8

F. That was the letter at the top of the test I picked up from my chemistry class. I was a freshman in college, and it was the first time I had ever failed a test in my life. I had always done well in school and prided myself on good grades. So, as I walked back to my dorm that day, it put me in a tailspin. I didn't know how to process this. I wasn't angry at the professor or coming up with reasons why this was unfair; I was furious with myself. It was causing me to question my identity. I was asking myself if I should quit. I thought maybe this meant I was a failure. Did this mean all I dreamed for my life was over? I was having a full-on identity crisis! As I look back, it's crazy how much weight I put on that one test.

All of us have something. For you, it may not be your grades at school. But we all have something we pursue that defines success. It might be winning in football, being known as super mom, awards, promotions, or a bunch of zeros at the end of your bank account balance. Even if it isn't written down somewhere and you've never talked about it out loud, we all have a picture in our mind that we try to live up to. We all dream of what our life should look like and how it should go. When we stay on pace with this, we feel great. But what about when you don't live up to it? What about when you aren't as far along as you thought you'd be at this point? When you feel like you never quite measure up?

This is where the hustle can feel exhausting. Your idea of success begins to interact with all you see on social media and the lives of your friends and family. You see their house, the smiles on their kid's faces, the vacations they are taking, and the degree they have earned. There's this nagging feeling you are falling behind or not keeping up. This drive inside you pushes you forward on what feels like an endless treadmill of trying to stay on top. There's a feeling that if you stop for even one second, you will crash and burn.

I want you to take a moment to think about the last time you felt like you didn't measure up. When was the last time you felt like a failure? What was it that caused you to feel this way?

How you respond when you fail to live up to your own standard of success reveals a lot about your heart.

In Philippians 3, Paul shares he was caught up in the hustle for much of his life. Paul was an achiever. He was motivated by success. He prided himself on being from the right family, following all the proper steps in life, and being a Hebrew of Hebrews. Paul was passionate about being the best at everything. He was well-educated and hustled to prove he could do everything right. This pursuit of success even drove him to lead in persecution against the early church. In the eyes of everyone who mattered to him, he was successful.

But something changed for Paul. In Philippians 3:7-8, Paul says he considers his long list of successes as loss. He no longer looked at his achievements in the same way. Paul had discovered a way to break out of the hustle for success. The question is how?

He tells us in verses 4-8. He saw these as loss, as a waste of time and energy because of Christ, because of the unbelievable worth of knowing Jesus!

Here's the truth Paul came to understand: What you pursue reveals what you value. Why did I have an identity crisis when I failed a test? It showed making A's and what those grades may bring me was what I valued most.

For Paul, something had shifted. He found a more valuable treasure.

The Hustle Stops Here: What would be on your list of successes in life? Think about the last time you felt you didn't measure up or failed. What do these things reveal about what you value? Today, take a few minutes to pray and ask God to show you what you treasure most. Ask Him to help you see what Paul saw and allow Jesus to set you free from the constant striving for achievement.

DAY FIFTEEN

A NEW TREASURE MEANS A NEW PERSPECTIVE BY PASTOR JOHN SELLERS

Read Philippians 3:7-8

How did Paul do it? What set him free from the endless treadmill of the hustle for success? His perspective changed because he found something worth so much more than the achievements he was pursuing.

What you pursue as success reveals what you treasure. God made you to be driven toward something in life. This is a natural wiring of human beings, and God put it there. Your heart and mind are made to strive after something. Our problem is we settle for pursuing things that aren't that wonderful.

Yesterday you asked the question, what does my pursuit of success reveal about what I value? You may value the feeling of other people celebrating you. You may value being the one who has the answers or the great ideas. You may value having a lot of money or a sense of control. The hustle for success is fueled by this endless pursuit of these things that captivate our hearts. It's almost like the old cartoons of someone chasing the carrot dangling at the end of the string, always just out of reach.

Paul was chasing all the same things we do. The hustle drove him to climb the ranks of authority and leadership. It caused him to behave just the right way, never stepping out of line. It led him to create a public persona when everyone looked to him as the godly one, the one who knew what to do, and the one who was always passionately fighting for what was right. And Paul was great at all of it!

But Paul's perspective changed when he met Jesus. Jesus appeared to him as he was traveling to Damascus where he was going to round up Christians and put them in jail. The grace and love Jesus showed to Paul, the very one who was persecuting Jesus' followers, changed his life forever. In Philippians 3:7-8, Paul tells us he experienced the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. When he encountered Jesus, he discovered a treasure more valuable than anything he had ever pursued.

Over the years, I have loved technology. Whether video games, graphics in movies, or the latest gadgets, I have always been

captivated. The speed at which technology advances and changes makes reflecting on what used to impress us laughable. At one time, Pong was the most advanced and groundbreaking video game. At some point, a massive, ridiculous-looking car phone was the status symbol. I remember being blown away by the animation and computer graphics in the original "Lion King." But those things seem silly now. Why is that? Because we have seen more remarkable and better things. We've seen video games that look so realistic. We've experienced virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and smartphones that fit in our hands with more computational power than the space shuttle had. When you experience something greater, it gives you a new perspective on what used to impress you.

When Paul encountered Jesus and began to follow Him, he found a treasure that eclipsed everything he used to hold so dear. Knowing Jesus was so great made the successes Paul had achieved throughout his life seem like garbage in comparison. His perspective changed when he found a greater treasure to pursue. He realized his desire for success was meant to be aimed toward Christ. This shift in perspective began to set Paul free from the hustle.

The Hustle Stops Here: The most significant question you must ask yourself is have you experienced what Paul experienced in Jesus? Have you found the surpassing worth of knowing Him? When you do, it will change what you value in life. This is the beginning of freedom from the hustle. Take a moment to pray and ask Jesus to allow you to know Him more and experience the treasure that makes everything else seem like a loss in comparison.

DAY SIXTEEN

JESUS' SUCCESS IS ENOUGH FOR YOU

BY PASTOR JOHN SELLERS

Read Philippians 3:9-16

The hustle can be exhausting! When you think you have achieved or experienced enough success, that voice inside tells you it isn't enough. After all, didn't you see what your friends did, their jobs, or what cars they drove? The hustle for success is tiring because it simply never ends.

Sometimes, our striving for achievement shapes our relationship with God. There's this feeling that I must measure up for Him to accept me. It could be because so much of our life is geared around performance at work, school, or sports. But the hustle can creep into your faith. Going to church becomes a box to check. Praying becomes a duty. Helping others or doing what's right becomes a way to score points with God. A performance mentality changes the pursuit of Jesus from walking in a relationship with Him into a religious system of lists, duties, and heartless rules.

For Paul and others who were called Pharisees, blending the pursuit of success and the pursuit of God made for a deadly combination. Though they looked godly on the outside and had all the knowledge you could imagine about God, they were so far from Him that they didn't even realize who Jesus was when He stood right in front of them. This combination caused them to miss God completely. Why? Because their striving wasn't really after Him but after the desires of their heart.

It's this religious striving for achievement that can be the most discouraging. When things go well, we feel great. We feel like God sees and loves us. But when we fail while trying to impress God, we are overwhelmed by shame, guilt, and the feeling that God could never love someone like me. After all, I can't measure up.

The reality Paul experienced in knowing Jesus changed everything for him. In Philippians 3:9, he explains part of why his relationship with Jesus was such a treasure to him. He says he is "found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." Paul understood he could not measure

up or hustle enough to earn forgiveness and a relationship with God. But the good news is Jesus earned it for him. Because Paul's faith was in Jesus, all the righteousness Jesus achieved was credited to Paul. In other words, Paul's value before God wasn't based on his own efforts but on what Jesus had done for him. This truth is what makes knowing Jesus so incredibly valuable, the freedom to rest in His accomplishments rather than our own.

Did you know there are football players with Super Bowl rings who never played a game throughout the championship season? It sounds hard to believe, but even players on the roster who serve as backups get a ring! Though they didn't make a catch, a block, a throw, or anything during official game time, their team's success is counted toward them, too.

This is what Paul experienced in Jesus. Paul sinned, but Jesus never did. Paul fell short, but Jesus never did. Paul blew it and missed it many times, but Jesus never did. But Jesus' achievements are counted to anyone who trusts in Him. His perfection is given to people like Paul, you, and me, who are far from perfect. That's grace! That is why knowing Jesus is such a treasure, and it makes all of our achievements look like garbage in comparison.

It reminds us of what Jesus taught in Matthew 11:28-30. He urges you to come to Him when you are weary and burdened, even by the hustle to achieve. And Jesus' promise is He will give you rest from your striving! How does Jesus give you rest? Because He has already achieved it all for you. When you walk with Him, you no longer have to run the treadmill, trying to perform well enough for God to love you. He already loves you and accepts you, not based on what you can do, but on what Jesus did for you!

The Hustle Stops Here: Remember the achievements of Jesus are enough. There's nothing more you need to achieve before God. Allow that reality to set you free from the hustle for success. Take a minute to pray and thank God for the grace He gives you by counting the achievements of Jesus toward you.

DAY SEVENTEEN

EVEN GREATER SUCCESS

BY PASTOR JOHN SELLERS

Read Romans 15:20 and Acts 20:18-25

I remember it like it was yesterday. My wife, Becca, and I were about to bring home our first child from the hospital. I'd never installed a car seat before, and it was harder than I expected. I tried to weave the seatbelt through correctly, find the anchor hooks, and check if it was level or tilted.

A hospital worker was available to help, so I had him check my work before getting my wife and baby. He shook the car seat hard, and it was very loose. He yelled, "Do you think it would be a good idea to put a baby in here?!" I said, "No, I guess not." He then showed me how to install it securely. Like many parents, Becca and I joke we had more training to drive a car than to be responsible for a child! But one thing is for sure, having children shifts your priorities. From that point forward, we weren't just looking after ourselves. We were living with a new purpose.

When you begin to follow Jesus, your drive for success and ambition does not disappear. But the new treasure you have in Christ gives you a new definition of success and changes what you live your life striving for. Instead of chasing status, wealth, or recognition, success becomes about serving others, honoring God, and building His Kingdom. It's a shift from self-centered goals to God-centered purpose, from the hustle of proving yourself to resting in the assurance that your value comes from Christ. You begin to pursue success in His Kingdom, not just your own. This means prioritizing love, generosity, and service; seeing lives transformed by Jesus; and living with integrity. Success in His kingdom means impacting others positively, sharing the gospel, and using your talents to glorify God instead of seeking personal gain.

For Paul, God began using his drive for success and achievement to accomplish even greater things in the world than when he was living for his own desires. The Holy Spirit led Paul to harness that drive within him to invest his time, energy, and resources to spread the good news of Jesus to the world. In Romans 15:20 (NIV), Paul says,

"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known." He made it his aim to spread the good news of Jesus all over the world. This was an ambitious, audacious, and stretching goal. It led Paul to take enormous risks and make great sacrifices to achieve it. By the end of Paul's life, God had used him to lead people to faith in Christ and start churches worldwide. God even used him to write most of the New Testament scriptures!

When your new perspective of what's most valuable combines with your pursuit of achievement in Christ, God gives supernatural results. When you begin living for Him instead of just for yourself, you start to experience what it's like to do what you were made to do. This is what God wants to set you free to experience: a connection to His purpose for your life.

Jesus wants to free you from the crushing hustle for success and the constant pressure to prove yourself. This freedom brings emotional and spiritual relief, replacing anxiety and exhaustion with peace and purpose. But this doesn't mean He wants to lower the bar of what He wants to accomplish in your life. Instead, Jesus wants you to accomplish more than you could ever ask, think, or imagine through Him and His Spirit. He gives you something greater to live for, to take risks for, and to pursue.

I often hear from people in our church who say the same thing: "I never thought God would use me like this." Serving and leading isn't a burden but a privilege and a gift from God. It brings joy, purpose, and fulfillment far beyond any personal ambition. Unlike the exhausting hustle for worldly success, serving in God's Kingdom fills you with peace, knowing you're making an eternal difference and partnering with God. There is nothing like being a part of helping others experience more of who Jesus is! This is what God wants to set you free to experience in Him.

The Hustle Stops Here: What would change if you formed your priorities through the lens of success in His Kingdom and not just your own? What are you ambitious to accomplish for Christ in your life? What step of faith is He calling you to take to help His Kingdom spread? Take a moment to reflect and pray, asking God to help you take these steps of faith as you aim your ambition toward Him.

DAY EIGHTEEN

THE MAMA MENTAL LIST

BY BECCA SELLERS

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11

It was 6 a.m. on a Tuesday. I awoke to my alarm instead of being woken up by someone else or our pet, which, in this season, felt like a small miracle. I threw on my cozy crewneck and glasses and shuffled sleepily across the house to wake our youngest up for school.

It did not take much past those ten strides to his room before “the list” — all the things that still needed to be accomplished in a matter of a few hours — was ringing in my head. Even though I had worked diligently to plan ahead, stay on top of things, and be mindful in our chaotic season, there was still so much to tackle before an important meeting I had been preparing for months.

The night before, I had loaded the dishwasher so everything would be clean in the morning, knowing future Becca would appreciate the effort since time was limited. That morning, all I needed to do was unload the clean dishes and clear the sink before I headed out. As usual, our 7-month-old English Cream Retriever, Falkor, was my house helper in unloading the dishwasher.

Everything was going smoothly; then suddenly, Falkor’s collar got caught on the bottom dishwasher rack. He panicked instantly, and chaos began to unfold. Falkor pulled away with all his strength, yanking the entire bottom rack out of the dishwasher.

Falkor took off sprinting with the dishwasher rack full of dishes attached to his collar toward what I call the “bottleneck of doom,” where the narrow space of our galley kitchen meets our family room. He was yelping, fighting for his life to be free. The rack was too wide, his body too long, and his fight-or-flight response too engaged. The entire bottom rack, loaded with dishes, leapt into the air, getting jammed between our cabinets and wall. The force of it flipped Falkor onto his back, and dishes shattered all around us.

In his panic, Falkor thought he was being attacked and flipped onto his back in defense. Chaos escalated as Falkor, terrified, launched a massive geyser of urine and a wartime cannon of feces in every direction and covering every surface around him as he flailed. Once he managed to free himself, Falkor bolted into another room, still

covered in the mess, spreading it farther as he hid in fear.

I don't have enough room here to tell you about the details of the massive, all-hands-on-deck cleanup effort it took to be ready for the important meeting that had been on my calendar for months. I had worked so hard to stay ahead and make the day lighter for our family.

As I drove to attend the meeting, the Spirit spoke to the deepest part of my heart, giving me a vivid picture of myself amidst all my hustles. The hustle often leaves me feeling disoriented, unable to see beauty amidst the chaos. I sensed Him whispering, "Becca, despite all the planning and prepping, all the simplifying and systems, you don't look much different than a puppy chaotically running amok and getting tossed about. Your vulnerable state in the unseen hustles of life is always safe with me. When your circumstances leave you belly-up and exposed, I am near. Your completeness is never defined by how prepared you are; your wholeness is found in Me."

When life becomes overwhelming, when the hustle feels relentless, and the list remains unaccomplished despite my best efforts, I turn to Paul's words to the believers in Thessalonica to remind myself how Jesus alone calls us to live the one life we have been given.

The Hustle Stops Here: Let's set our lists and systems down for a moment to prayerfully center and check in with ourselves. Let us apply our Thessalonian framework to our daily lives and adjust accordingly:

- *Be deeply known by the God of this Universe.*
- *Be known by others for our unselfish love and teachable nature.*
- *Aspire to lead a peace-filled, non-attention-seeking, quiet life.*
- *Mind our own business; stay in our own lane.*
- *Be good stewards of everything we have.*
- *Work hard with our hands for His glory alone, not for others' approval.*
- *Preserve our influence for the gospel and hold Him out as beautiful.*

The hustle stops here; let's anchor our value not in our striving but in His love, trusting we are already fully seen, known, and loved by Him.

DAY NINETEEN

THE FREEDOM OF CONTENTMENT

BY PASTOR JOHN SELLERS

Read Philippians 4:11-13

Imagine being in a prison cell when everything you desire is outside those bars. For Paul, he had been following God's leading for years and had seen the miraculous happen. He saw many people begin to follow Jesus, and he started churches in town after town, city after city. God used him to preach, teach, heal, and raise up pastors and leaders. But now, Paul was imprisoned for what he did for the Lord. Not only that, but in prison, Paul faced the possibility of death, while grappling with the news that his friends at the Philippian church were facing attacks from the outside and divisions from within. And Paul couldn't do what he wanted because he was stuck in prison.

You may have never faced the exact situation Paul was in, but have you ever experienced a time when what you wanted didn't happen? In Paul's case, God's will for him did not align with his will for himself. God had led him to take significant risks to spread the news of Jesus and start new churches, and now that very thing put him in prison. With everything in him, Paul desired to be with his friends in Philippi and help solve the problems they faced. You may think it fitting for Paul to be bitter or even angry with God. But for Paul, that couldn't be further from the truth.

Paul learned to enjoy another result of the freedom Jesus gives us from the hustle for success: contentment. Unlike the endless pursuit of achievements and recognition that leaves us weary, contentment in Christ means finding satisfaction in what God has done, rather than what we can do. It is resting in His sufficiency instead of constantly striving for more.

When you rest in the truth that Jesus has already accomplished everything you need, and through faith in Him, His success is counted as yours, it frees you from the pressure of performance. The success you pursue for God's kingdom is freedom, not bondage. It's a joy and a privilege. For example, success in God's kingdom might look like serving others selflessly, sharing how you came to know Jesus Christ as savior, or helping those in need without expecting anything in return. These acts bring fulfillment and joy, contrasting sharply with

the stress and exhaustion of pursuing worldly success. This shift in perspective changes everything.

Instead of being bitter, Paul expresses joy even in chains. While many would respond with frustration or resentment when their desires go unfulfilled, Paul chose joy. Paul understood his worth and purpose were not tied to his ability to control his circumstances but to his reliance on Jesus. He tells us in Philippians 4:11-13 he has learned the secret of being content in any circumstance.

Paul explains this secret to contentment applies when times are good, you have all the food and resources you need, and everything seems to be going well. But this secret also applies when things are going badly, such as living in scarcity and even going hungry. Paul had experienced both sets of circumstances many times over as a direct result of following Jesus. Jesus had led him into times of plenty and times of need.

So, what is Paul's secret? He tells us in verse 13: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." The secret of contentment at all times is relying on the presence and power of Jesus. When things are going well and everyone is telling you how great you are, it is easy to believe success results from who you are. But Paul learned that in success, he had to remember Jesus gave him the strength and calling to experience it. When times are tough, and things aren't going as planned, when people are not praising you but instead are attacking you, you may feel like a failure and believe you don't measure up. In those moments, the secret to contentment is the same. Paul learned to rely on Jesus' presence and power to lead him through it.

The power of this secret allowed Paul to experience joy in both triumphs and trials. Freedom from the hustle includes contentment in all circumstances as you rest in your relationship with Jesus, who is with you always.

The Hustle Stops Here: What season are you in: success or struggle? Where are you looking for strength in the midst of it? Today, God is calling you to turn to Jesus. He is powerful, and He is present with you right now. Knowing Him and experiencing Him is the greatest treasure there is, a treasure no one can take away from you. Will you take a moment to pray and praise Jesus, who is with you even now?

DAY TWENTY

WAITING IN THE SEASON

BY GABBIE VEGA

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

When you think of seasons, where does your brain immediately go? Do you immediately think of the beach during summer? Or snowball fights in the winter? Picking flowers in the spring? For me, I think of apple picking and apple cider doughnuts in the autumn. Growing up in New York, this was my favorite season, getting to watch as the leaves changed to the most stunning shades of amber, gold, brown and burgundy. As much as I love living in Florida, it can be hard to remember seasons exist, because here there are only two: super-hot and slightly-less-hot.

All kidding (not really) aside, there truly is something so special about getting to experience the change of seasons. They each bring something different and have a special aspect about them. And the beauty of God's design is if there is one season you don't enjoy as much, it never lasts forever. It is a stunning cycle reflective of our own lives.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 tells us there is a season for everything. "There is a time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal...a time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance (NLT)." It sounds so poetic and nice on the paper, but what happens when you find yourself in a season you want so badly not to be in?

What happens when that season of laughing turns to a season of crying, or your season of dancing unexpectedly shifts into a season of grieving...what then? In the moment when your eyes first open for the day and the heartbreak, frustrations, and stressors of your current circumstance comes flooding back and your heart feels the inexplicable weight and pain of the brokenness of this world...what do you do then? The natural prayer is, "Lord, take the pain...change my circumstances...don't let this happen...allow me to go back to before this happened." It's natural to want to hustle your way out of the "undesired" seasons, whether it's unemployment, loss, burnout, debt, or exhaustion.

But what happens when you are forced to sit in the discomfort of that season? For me and the way that I am wired, I try to problem solve my way out: "If I just worship more or read my Bible more, then maybe this time will speed itself up." Inevitably, on the other side of the analyzing and problem solving is the realization that we can't speed up time, because no matter how badly I wished the relentless cold of winter to speed itself up, I couldn't skip December to March.

Good thing, too, because if I had skipped winter, the ground wouldn't have had the chance to prepare for new growth in spring. The apples I loved picking in the autumn would not have come without the winter I so badly wanted to avoid. What felt like a delay was actually preparation.

This is where we need to lay down the hustle. The constant striving for the next season often blinds us to the blessings and growth God wants to bring about in this one. There is goodness in every season. There is blessing, purpose, and growth, even when there isn't comfort. Our God is not a wasteful God. He takes even what the enemy meant for harm and turns it for the good of those who love Him. What would it look like if we approached every tough season as if it were sent by a Savior, as a tool to advance the work HE wants to do in our hearts and lives?

God is with us in every moment, working all things together for our good. Instead of hustling through or avoiding the hard times, let us remember that He is using every season to shape us, grow us, and draw us closer to Him.

So, instead of hustling to escape, let's learn to trust. God knows where you are. He knows where you want to go, and He sees the bigger picture; after all, He's the One who painted it. Rest in knowing He is preparing you for what's next. This season will not last forever, so be present and receive everything He has for you in it.

The Hustle Stops Here: Take a deep breath. Reflect and list five things you are grateful for that happened to you this week. Thank the Lord for those blessings, big or small. Think about that thing you are waiting on. Ask the Lord to reveal to you the blessings and lessons He wants you to observe in this season. Thank the Lord in advance for the fact that He is going to move and work things out for your good.

week four

THE HUSTLE TO SATISFY YOURSELF

MEMORY VERSE

“You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

Psalm 16:11 NIV

We all have desires, whether it's happiness, pleasure, love, or comfort, that we believe will make us feel fulfilled. But the hustle to satisfy these desires often leaves us empty. No matter how much we chase after what we want, it's never enough to completely satisfy this longing to be satisfied.

This week, we'll explore how chasing after quick fixes and immediate satisfaction can derail your life and leave you longing for more. Jesus offers a deeper fulfillment that transcends temporary desires. He invites you to stop chasing after what can never fully satisfy and to find lasting joy in Him. When you align your desires with what He offers, you'll discover a fulfillment that goes beyond anything the world can give.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

WHY GOD WANTS YOU TO REALLY ENJOY LIFE (AND NOT FEEL GUILTY ABOUT IT)

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Psalm 16

We've all felt the guilt after indulging in something we enjoy — a dessert we couldn't resist, a Netflix binge, or a nap while chores pile up. It's like we've been conditioned to think if something feels good, it must be wrong. We've absorbed the idea that pleasure is bad, as if God disapproves when we experience joy.

Many of us quietly suspect God doesn't really want us to enjoy life. We assume pleasure and fulfillment are temptations to resist, not gifts to embrace. In our minds, God becomes this stern figure withholding good things, waiting for us to slip up by enjoying life too much. To many, God is the ultimate buzzkill.

But what if we've misunderstood God's heart? What if the problem isn't pleasure itself? Could it be that our desires aren't too strong but too weak? What if we've been settling for far less than what God is offering?

In college, I came across a quote by C.S. Lewis that changed my life. He wrote: "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." -C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

That last line — "We are far too easily pleased" — stopped me. I'd always thought following Jesus meant giving up fun and excitement until Heaven. But Lewis flipped that. What if the problem isn't that we want too much from life, but that we're settling for too little?

Jesus didn't come to make us miserable. He said He came to give life in abundance (John 10:10). God isn't asking us to deny joy; He's asking us to stop settling for cheap, fleeting pleasures when He's offering something far greater. Jesus doesn't want us to reject joy but to reject shallow versions that don't last.

God designed us for joy, fulfillment, and delight. Those deep desires — the longing for satisfaction, happiness, and pleasure — aren't evil. They're not something to suppress or reject. God placed those desires within us. He created us to seek joy, pursue pleasure, and desire fulfillment. The problem isn't our desires; it's where we go to satisfy them.

Psalm 16:11 says, "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." God doesn't just offer fleeting moments of happiness; He offers eternal pleasures, overflowing and unending.

"Eternal" here means maximum, all-encompassing joy. It's the kind of pleasure that fully satisfies with no emptiness. It's not just about joy in Heaven; it starts now. Eternal, fulfilling joy is found in God's presence.

If God placed these desires in us, they were meant to lead us to something greater. They point us to the true source of all joy and pleasure: God Himself. He is the origin of every good thing we long for, and our desires are meant to draw us closer to Him.

When we feel that longing for joy, it's not something to feel guilty about; it's an invitation from God to draw closer. These desires are like a compass, guiding us to the source of true fulfillment. The pleasures we experience — the warmth of the sun, a great meal, good music, time with loved ones, the delight of sex — aren't random. They're meant to awaken something deeper within us, pointing us back to the Creator.

God wants us to enjoy the world because He created it for our pleasure. But these things were never meant to be our ultimate source of fulfillment. Every good thing reflects God's goodness and is meant to lead us to praise and pursue Him.

The Hustle Stops Here: God isn't asking us to reject pleasure; He's asking us to stop settling for less when He's offering so much more.

Where are you settling for less in your life? What are you hustling to satisfy yourself, when God offers something far greater and more fulfilling? Reflect on the pleasures you pursue. Are they leading you to the ultimate source—God Himself? Jesus isn't asking you to give up joy; He's inviting you to pursue God, where deep joy and eternal pleasure are found.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

WHAT MAKES THE GOSPEL GOOD NEWS?

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read 1 Peter 3:14-18

We all know the feeling of hearing good news, the kind that changes your day, maybe even your life. Ever had one of those moments?

I remember when our family dog went missing. We searched everywhere, calling his name, with that pit in my stomach growing because I feared the worst. Then my phone rang; a neighbor found him in their yard, tail wagging. That was good news.

Or the time we made an offer on a house. We loved it, but the market was wild. Bidding wars everywhere, and we weren't confident. Then the call came; our offer was accepted! The shock, the excitement ... it felt unreal. That was good news, too.

One unforgettable moment came from my wife. Her voice was shaky when she called me at work. We had been trying for a baby for years, and every failed attempt chipped away at our hope. But this time was different. The test came back positive. I was going to be a dad. That was good, life-changing news.

We've all had moments when good news brings joy, relief, and hope. Whether it's finding a lost pet, getting your dream house, or hearing you're going to be a parent, these moments fill our hearts with happiness. But the thrill fades. Life returns to normal, and we hustle for the next moment of good news, always searching for the next thing to fill us up.

The problem? We look for good news in the wrong places. The promotion becomes routine, the house feels ordinary, and even great marriage face real-life challenges. Joy fades, and soon we feel empty again. So, we hustle for the next bit of good news, but are we looking in the right place?

This might surprise you, but the "gospel" literally means "good news." The gospel is the ultimate good news. Most people think the gospel is just about going to heaven instead of hell. And yes, that's part of it, but it's not the heart of it. We often focus on the benefits we receive, such as forgiveness, redemption, healing, or eternal life. These are incredible, but they're not the ultimate good news.

So what is? In 1 Peter 3:18, it says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." Did you catch that? The good news of the gospel is about being brought into a relationship with God. This is the core of the gospel: Jesus removes the barrier of sin that separated us from God. The ultimate good news is that we can now know God personally and experience deep joy and fulfillment in Him. Everything else, such as forgiveness and eternal life, is a means to this end: Bringing us into a restored relationship with God.

Through Jesus, we're not just saved from sin, hell, or death. We're saved to something: a life of knowing and enjoying God. This is where our deepest longings are met, because God is the source of all satisfaction.

Why is this such good news? Because the gospel isn't about making life a little better or giving you a ticket to Heaven. It's about restoring you to the One who can truly satisfy your soul's deepest desires.

When we hustle to please ourselves, we're really seeking the joy only God can provide. The gospel shows we don't have to hustle for these things anymore. In Christ, they are freely given. Fullness of life comes from knowing and enjoying God. This is the life you were made for—a life where your deepest needs are fulfilled in a relationship with the One who loves you beyond imagination. Now that is good news; Christ died to bring you to God!

The Hustle Stops Here: Are you tired of hustling? If so, ask yourself if you desire God. Do you take pleasure in Him? When someone follows Jesus, the biggest change is seeing God as their greatest treasure. Their eyes are opened to the reality that a relationship with Him is the source of the ultimate pleasures. Do you see God this way? It's natural to desire forgiveness to avoid hell, but it's supernatural to embrace God as your joy and treasure. Without this desire for God, even Heaven will feel empty, because Heaven is about being with Him forever. Do you have that kind of deep desire for God? If not, ask Him.

Pray, "Lord, open my eyes to see You as my greatest treasure and the true source of all joy and fulfillment. Turn my heart towards You so that I seek You above all else."

DAY TWENTY-THREE

THE DANGERS OF HUSTLING IN HASTE

BY PASTOR TIM BULLEMAN

Read Psalm 27:14

We often pursue joy, love, and comfort, which are desires God designed to be fulfilled in Him, drawing us closer to our Creator. The problem arises when we grow impatient, forgetting these desires are only good when pursued within God's plan. Rushing ahead of God's timing or seeking shortcuts risks missing His best. We may compromise the values and godly principles meant to guide us.

In my life, I have rushed ahead of the Lord, chasing what I thought would bring joy and comfort. Moving ahead without waiting for the Holy Spirit's direction often led to poor decisions. Impatience leads to negative consequences that could have been avoided. Some impulses led to unfortunate financial decisions, while others compromised our values and integrity.

Impatience has cost me in many areas: relationally, morally, physically, and financially. One day, I walked into a wholesale store and was approached by a sales associate at the cellphone kiosk. The pitch was I could get the latest cellphone at no cost, along with upgrades for all the phones on our plan. In my excitement, I ignored my wife's advice to think about it and said, "It's a no-brainer! Let's do it!" My impatience led to a bad decision. Being the Christmas season, we had a tight budget. I soon discovered the upgrade was not free; taxes for each phone and an unforeseen balance made what seemed "free" cost a few hundred dollars upfront.

This kind of rushing is promoted everywhere today. The world encourages instant gratification, urging us to act quickly without considering the long-term effects. But hustling to satisfy our desires often leads to trading integrity for temporary relief. We may compromise values, indulge in harmful behaviors, or overlook unhealthy relationships in pursuit of fleeting happiness.

In Genesis, Esau, in a moment of hunger, sold his birthright for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29-34). The birthright was a significant inheritance, representing material wealth, spiritual blessings, and leadership. By giving it up, Esau traded a lasting legacy for temporary satisfaction. His impulsivity blinded him to the greater blessing he gave up. Like

Esau, when we rush to meet our desires without discernment, we risk trading peace, integrity, and perhaps even our relationship with God for fleeting gains. Esau's impulsivity seems crazy, but today, people give up their jobs, marriages, and families for far less. How often do we compromise a greater blessing to settle for convenience?

The remedy for this restless pursuit is patience and trust in God's timing. He knows our needs and promises to provide if we wait on Him. Psalm 27:14 says, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." This waiting isn't passive; it requires strength, faith, and courage, trusting God will provide in His perfect timing.

When we wait for God to bring love, comfort, or joy, we align ourselves with His will and protect ourselves from the traps of instant gratification. God's best comes without sorrow or moral conflict. Proverbs tells us, "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it." He provides in ways that fulfill us without regret. Jesus alone satisfies the deepest longings of our souls, offering joy that the world cannot give. Through His sacrifice, He invites us to stop chasing empty pursuits and find true fulfillment in Him. In Jesus, every desire is fulfilled. We're filled with joy in His presence, with eternal pleasures at His right hand (Psalm 16:11).

Jesus gives us the power to resist compromise and offers fulfillment that doesn't cost our integrity. By trusting Him, we find a better way to satisfy our desires without giving in to sin. Let us pursue the deep, eternal joy found in God's presence.

The Hustle Stops Here: Find a quiet place to reflect on these questions:

- 1. Are there areas in your life where you feel tempted to give in to your impulses rather than waiting on God's timing?*
- 2. Are there areas where you are compromising your values to gain comfort, love, or happiness quickly?*
- 3. How can you demonstrate trusting God more with your desires and patiently wait for Him?*
- 4. Are you settling for less when God is offering something far greater and more fulfilling? Reflect on how your desires can lead you closer to God, the ultimate source of fulfillment.*

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

TRADING THE ULTIMATE FOR THE IMMEDIATE

BY PASTOR ROB RUSTON

Read 1 John 2:15

Desires are powerful! They drive us, motivate us, and shape many of our decisions in life. But there is a perilous danger when our desires become the center of our lives. When we prioritize our desires over our relationship with God, we compromise what matters most for something that ultimately doesn't matter at all. We trade the ultimate for the immediate, and in doing so, we can derail our lives.

This subtle but dangerous pull of misplaced desires draws us away from God and toward things that can never truly satisfy. Think about those moments when you've made decisions based on immediate desires, such as hustling to buy something you couldn't afford, compromising your values for a moment of pleasure, or seeking approval in the wrong places. These decisions might have offered fleeting satisfaction, but they often leave us feeling empty, burdened by regret, and farther from the life God intends for us.

Jesus warns us against this trap when He says, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul (Mark 8:36, NIV)?" While the world promises satisfaction, only God can provide true fulfillment. When we chase after worldly gain, we forfeit the deeper satisfaction that comes from resting in God's presence. The world offers countless temptations that seem appealing now, but they come at the cost of what's most important: our relationship with God and the peace, purpose, and joy that comes from walking closely with Jesus.

When our desires control us, we risk making decisions that pull us further from God. Have you ever found yourself prioritizing the immediate over the eternal or the temporary over the permanent? Misplaced desires offer quick fixes that promise to satisfy but ultimately leave us empty, ashamed, and trapped in a cycle of hustle that never delivers lasting peace.

However, there is hope. God invites us to realign our desires with His will. As Romans 12:2 urges us, we must be "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" so we can discern God's good and perfect will. He alone knows what we truly need and promises to satisfy our

deepest longings in ways that the world never can. When we put God first, our desires take their proper place, not as our master, but as tools that can be used for His glory and our good, freeing us from the endless hustle for satisfaction.

John's warning in 1 John 2:15 says our hearts cannot be divided. We cannot simultaneously love God and the world because their values are fundamentally opposed. The process of becoming more like Christ involves a continual turning away from worldly desires and aligning ourselves with God's purposes. This process is ongoing, but it is crucial if we are to live fully in the freedom God offers. Loving the world leads us away from God, and, as John says, "the love of the Father is not in" those who choose the world over Him. It's not that God loves us less if we struggle with worldly desires; it's that our love for Him becomes choked out when our hearts are consumed with other things.

So, how do we resist the temptation of immediate satisfaction? It starts with fixing our eyes on Jesus. The more we focus on loving God, the less attractive the things of the world become. It's not about trying harder to say "no" to worldly desires; it's about saying "yes" to a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with God. As we draw closer to Him, we begin to see the world for what it truly is: temporary, fleeting, and unable to satisfy the deep longings of our souls.

Ultimately, it's a matter of desire. What do we want more: the things of the world or our eternal relationship with God through Christ? When we choose to love God above all else, we align with this purpose and find the freedom and joy that only comes from living in His will.

The Hustle Stops Here: "Lord, I recognize I have often allowed my immediate desires to take precedence over my relationship with You. I confess these choices have left me feeling empty and distant from You. Help me to realign my desires with Your will and to seek the lasting fulfillment that only You can provide. Lead me away from the danger of misplaced desires and draw me closer to Your heart. Amen!"

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

FROM STRIVING TO SURRENDER

BY ANDREW GALLAGHER

Read Luke 22:41-42

Have you ever heard the saying, “Never meet your heroes?” It speaks to the disappointment when reality falls short of our expectations. As I’ve grown older, this sense of letdown has become a familiar part of life. We build up ideas of what things should be, whether it’s our career, relationships, or personal achievements, and often we find ourselves disappointed when reality doesn’t match our hopes. I call it “Christmas Day syndrome.” We spend weeks anticipating the excitement of the day, only to feel like something’s missing once it arrives.

By 24, I had achieved everything that I had wanted since I was 13 within the world of worship leading. I had led worship at some of the biggest venues in Europe, sung with renowned worship artists, and worked for the church I could only have dreamed of working for, and yet I was still unsatisfied and left longing for more. I was tired of hustling for my own success and accolades, constantly striving to achieve more, but it left me empty.

In 2018, while serving at a church conference, I had a moment that changed everything. During worship, they played the song “New Wine” by Hillsong Worship, and the line “So I yield to You and to Your careful hand/When I trust You, I don’t need to understand” hit me hard. It felt like God was speaking directly to my heart. All along, I had been hustling to satisfy my own desires, and it left me feeling empty. I realized true fulfillment doesn’t come from achieving what I want but from surrendering to God’s will, even when I don’t fully understand it.

In Luke 22, Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane, crying out to the Father as He is preparing to die a gruesome death. He asks for the Father to listen to what He wants, to His desire, but ends with “yet not my will, but yours be done.” Jesus shows us submitting to the Father’s will brings joy and peace, even if it’s not immediate. Trusting God will work all things for good frees us from constantly hustling for our own ambitions.

That moment at the conference taught me the more I focused on

myself, the more unfulfilled I became. But when I shifted my attention to serving others, whether it was leading worship with humility or simply helping those in need, I began to experience deeper joy and peace. Jesus said in Mark 10:43-45 that true greatness comes not from being served but from serving others. When we stop hustling for our own glory and allow God to use us to meet the needs of others, we find the satisfaction we've been searching for all along.

No one exemplifies this better than Jesus. He had every right to have the world serve Him. He was called Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, King of the Jews, Lamb of God, Emmanuel. He had every authority to take His rightful place as both the earthly and heavenly ruler, yet He chose to serve others. He met people in their homes, washed their feet, fed the hungry, socialized with those who were outcast by society, and ultimately took our place and died on the cross for our sins.

As Christians, the only thing we should hustle for is to become more like Jesus every day. This means letting go of our own ambitions and living to serve others. I can guarantee if you make this shift, you won't continue to live unsatisfied.

The Hustle Stops Here: I encourage you to start every morning with this prayer: "Dear Jesus, you are my King. I live as your servant. I know the plans I have for my life, but today I submit those plans to You and Your perfect will. Show me how I can serve those around me and become more like You with each passing day. Open my eyes to the needs of others, and teach me to trust Your plans over my own."

As we learn to surrender our desires and focus on serving others, we may not see immediate results or feel an instant change, but we can trust God is at work. He promises to bring true joy and satisfaction in ways that are deeper than anything we could achieve on our own. The more we let go of hustling for our own ambitions, the more room we create for God to fill us with His purpose, peace, and joy.

DAY TWENTY-SIX

DELIGHTING IN THE LORD TRANSFORMS DESIRES.

BY DREW MILLER

Read Psalm 37:4

“Take Delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart” -Psalm 37:4

No matter how many times I may read or recite this verse in my mind, I always find myself searching the deepest parts of my heart to answer this question honestly: What does it mean to truly delight in the Lord? What does that even look like practically, emotionally, and spiritually? I don't believe this can be a “one and done” question. Rather, it is a question to ask and revisit moment by moment. To fully unpack what it means to “delight in the Lord” and how it relates to my story, I must go back to my younger years.

I was born and raised in Orlando. I have always said no matter how much we traveled as a family or road-tripped, Florida still felt like home. I love the weather, the beaches, the lakes and woods, the sunshine and sun-showers, and my family has generational history here.

I grew up going to church and attended the Christian school affiliated with that church. My grandmother was an ordained Methodist minister who cared for the staff and members of the church. This upbringing deeply influenced my faith, providing a strong foundation in God's word and instilling in me the importance of seeking a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. My parents taught my sister and me according to God's word. Were they perfect? No. But I was surrounded by Christian culture and influence. It's easy for me to say I believed in God — and I really did — but I never felt Him in the way others described in so many chapel or church services.

One day in high school, I went to my youth pastor and asked him, “How do I get closer to the Lord?” or “How do I feel God's presence like so many people talk about?” He pointed me to the Bible and encouraged me to read the book of John. This wasn't bad advice; it just didn't seem to make the impact I had hoped for. I remember feeling frustrated and disappointed, like I was missing something that others seemed to experience so easily.

About a year later, I attended a worship conference where they were

defining agape love and teaching about righteousness, surrender, and the call to “love the Lord with your whole being.” This is the moment I chose to identify my sin, lay down my life — my desires, hopes, and vices — obey God’s word, and take delight in Christ. It was at this moment I experienced the Holy Spirit, and all I had heard others describe in church finally became real to me. It was this moment that gave me the language to understand what it means to delight in the Lord.

I believe the call to “love the Lord (Mark 12:30)” is directly tied to the call God gives us in Psalm 37:4. Delighting in the Lord means to be fully satisfied by Christ. But how do we take pleasure in the Lord? How do we find satisfaction, joy, and happiness in Him? The key is laying down our lives and submitting to God’s authority. It means obedience to His word. I know this may sound rigid, but this heavenly mandate (we find our lives when we lay them down) is what allows us to step into God’s perfect will for us. This truth reshapes our desires in a way that aligns with the purpose for which we were created. In this life, there are two options: Hustle for ourselves — chasing personal success, recognition, and material gain — or live for the Lord, seeking His will and serving others.

I spent so much of my younger years hustling for my own desires, seeking achievements, recognition, and fulfillment in things that seemed important. But none of it truly satisfied. It wasn’t until I surrendered my desires to God that I understood the meaning of Psalm 37:4. Delighting in the Lord is not about striving for what we think will make us happy; it’s about trusting God enough to believe that His plans are better than our own.

The Hustle Stops Here: I challenge you to read a portion of Psalms every day. Not only will you be in God’s word, but you will see how David prayed honestly and vulnerably before the Lord. Let this be an example for you. Ask God to shape your desires so that He becomes your greatest delight. The more we let go of relentlessly striving for personal success, the more we will find the joy and satisfaction that only comes from God.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

FAITH WINS EVERY TIME

BY KAREN ESTEVEZ

Read Romans 4:16-25

Do you remember being taught how to ride a bike? I remember how scary those moments were! First, I had to gear up with knee and elbow pads, then put on a helmet. I looked at my older brother with worry, wondering what could happen that required so much protection. Then came the inevitable falls, struggling to maintain my balance, falling over and over again. That's when I realized why I needed all that protection!

However, I did not give up because my brother kept telling me, "You got this and it will be so fun!" With that in the back of my mind, I clung to the promise that one day I would ride on my own and experience the joy and freedom of biking. After many days of fighting myself to get back on the bike, and many bandages later, I finally became a true bike rider!

Having faith in what God promises is like that struggle; it's an inner battle between what we see now and laying down our own thoughts to embrace the promise God has given us. Just like I faced the unknown of whether I would fall again when learning to ride a bike, I held on to the promise that if I continued and did not give up, I would get there. The same is true for our faith in God. If we keep trusting Him and do not give up, we will embrace His promises.

In Romans 4:20, we see Abraham did just that! It says, "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God." Abraham's unwavering faith in God's promise kept him moving forward with joy, strength, and motivation. Yes, there will be moments of doubt, but staying focused on God's promises will help us win the battle we face.

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus speaks to His disciples after they struggled to heal a boy who was suffering from severe seizures. The disciples, confused about their failure, asked Jesus why they couldn't heal the boy. Jesus explained, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

By using the mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds, Jesus emphasizes even the tiniest amount of genuine faith has immense potential when it is placed in God and His promises. The focus is not on how much faith we have, but rather on who we place our faith in and the certainty of God's promises. When our faith, even if small, is genuine and fully in God, amazing and seemingly impossible things can happen.

We all face challenging times — sickness, the loss of loved ones, unexpected disasters. The list can be long. But if we enter these situations, not focused on the problem but on God's promises, our faith is strengthened. Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus is the answer to our deepest needs, desires, and joys. He is the reward that fulfills us completely, and the key to reaching that fulfillment is maintaining unwavering faith, despite changing circumstances. It means surrendering our battles to Jesus. When we put our faith in Him, we can win every fight without relying on our own hustle and striving.

Looking back on my life, there has never been a time when I stood firm in my faith and regretted it. For example, when I lost my job a few years ago, I chose to trust God, rather than give in to fear. Though it was difficult, I saw God provide for my family in unexpected ways, leading me to a better opportunity that I would have never imagined. So today, choose to trust, release your struggles into His hands, and know God will always write a better story than we could ever imagine.

The Hustle Stops Here: Today is a new beginning. Grab a pen and a piece of paper, and write down everything you've been trying to accomplish and fulfill on your own. That list represents battles you no longer need to fight alone. Today, surrender them to Jesus; trust He will take on your burdens and accomplish what you cannot. As you walk by faith and not by sight, declare this prayer: "Jesus, I fully surrender my will and my ways to You. I trust You will guide me through every situation, leading me to the promises You have for me. As You lead, I will follow. Amen."

week five

THE HUSTLE FOR LIKES

MEMORY VERSE

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 John 4:9-10 NIV

In a world dominated by social media and the constant need for approval, many of us get caught up in the hustle for likes, followers, and affirmation. Our culture's fixation on recognition makes it easy to feel like we're always performing, or chasing that elusive sense of being enough. We turn to social media likes, praise from peers, or the affection of others, believing it will fill the void. But these pursuits always leave us empty and craving more. This week, we're diving into a life-changing truth: Jesus' love is the only validation that truly satisfies. He sees, knows, and loves us completely, without condition. When we rest in His acceptance, we're freed from the exhausting hustle for approval. Let go of the need for likes and the pressure to prove yourself, and embrace the unshakable love and acceptance only Jesus can provide.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

YOU ARE LOVED

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Genesis 29:31-35

Leah's story isn't a Hallmark romance. It's more like a reality TV show filled with deceit, heartbreak, and a desperate longing to be loved. Leah was the older sister of Rachel, and both were married to Jacob. But Jacob only married Leah because her father, Laban, tricked him. To Jacob, Leah was a mistake; Rachel was the girl he really wanted.

The Bible painfully contrasts the sisters: "Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful (Genesis 29:17)." In today's terms, that's like saying Leah was unattractive, while Rachel was the knockout everyone admired. Leah became the girl no one wanted, rejected by her father, overshadowed by her sister, and unloved by her husband.

Desperately seeking approval, she hustled to feel valued, loved, and accepted. Her strategy to win Jacob's affection? Giving him children, something Rachel couldn't do. She thought she could earn love and feel accepted by giving Jacob what he desired.

Leah's story mirrors our own hustle for likes. For Leah, this meant hustling for Jacob's approval, hoping each child would bring her the affection she longed for. But just as Leah's efforts left her more heartbroken, our own hustle to earn approval and acceptance from others often leaves us empty and feeling unworthy.

Genesis 29:31-35 captures Leah's cries. Each time she bore a son, Leah thought, "Surely now Jacob will love me." But no matter what she did, Jacob's heart remained fixed on Rachel. Every birth was a failed attempt to earn his love, and every day Leah felt like she was falling short.

Haven't we all felt that same longing? Deep down, we all want to be noticed, appreciated, and truly accepted. There's this relentless drive to feel like we belong, like we matter. So, we hustle, constantly seeking validation and striving to prove we're worthy of love and acceptance. But the more we chase after human approval, the emptier we end up feeling. People's opinions are fragile and ever-changing, leaving us anxious and insecure. Just like Leah, we get caught in an exhausting cycle of striving, constantly questioning if we'll ever be enough.

Leah's story challenges us to rethink this pursuit. We were made to feel loved and accepted, but are we looking for it in the right places? If our sense of worth depends on others' approval, we'll always end up feeling like we're falling short.

Our deepest need to be seen and loved can only be truly met by God. His love is unwavering, unconditional, and doesn't depend on our performance. 1 John 4:9-10 reminds us: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." God's love isn't based on what we do but on what He's already done for us through Jesus. His love is the ultimate source of validation and is more than enough. Through Jesus Christ, you are already seen, loved, and incredibly valuable to God.

After years of trying to win Jacob's love, Leah's story takes a turn. When she gives birth to her fourth son, Judah, she says, "This time, I will praise the LORD (Genesis 29:35)." Did you catch that? No mention of Jacob. Leah finally realized human approval could never satisfy her deepest need. She took her eyes off her husband's validation and fixed them on God. In God, she found the love and acceptance she'd been seeking all along.

In that moment, Leah stopped hustling for approval. She quit striving for praise and found rest in God's love. Leah declared, "This time, I will praise the LORD," because His love fully satisfied her deepest need to be seen, known and valued.

But God didn't stop there. Judah became an ancestor of Jesus Christ. The Savior of the world came through Leah, the unwanted and unloved woman. God chose out of love to bring His Son into the world not through beautiful Rachel, but through overlooked Leah.

The Hustle Stops Here: Even when we feel unseen or rejected, God sees us and loves us deeply. This week, we will learn if we hustle for praise as our source of approval, we'll be disappointed and heartbroken. Instead of seeking praise, let's choose to declare, "This time, I will praise the LORD." Spend time praising God today that you are loved not because you earned it, but because of what Jesus earned for you. His love is the only source of approval that never leaves us empty.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

YOU ARE CHOSEN

BY SHANA HILTON

Read Ephesians 1:4-5

We have all questioned whether we are truly loved. We've asked ourselves: Does anyone really love me? Does anyone truly know me? If they did truly know me, would they still love me? Because of these questions that plague us, we search to be known, loved, accepted, and chosen. We do things, say things, and act in certain ways, all in a desperate attempt to fill the gaping hole in our hearts, longing for true acceptance.

Here's the truth behind all of this: No one can fill this gaping hole. No one can provide what our souls so desperately need. Until we understand this and learn to fight it, we will struggle, constantly grasping at anything and anyone to fill this void. We will place undue expectations on people that they can never fulfill, and we will be left hurting and alone. But we don't have to continue living in this cycle.

There is a truth that surpasses our feelings: God chose you! Ephesians 1:4 says, "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." He has chosen you because He loves you. This is a hard truth for many people to believe. Yet, we can live in the reality of this love every day. We can live loved, deeply assured God's love is constant, steadfast, and unconditional.

Even though we all have a desire to love and be loved, deep down, we often feel like we don't deserve it. This sense of unworthiness leads us to hide from God, who is ironically the One who loves us the most. We think if God truly saw us as we are, His response would be anger or disappointment. So, we keep our facades intact, presenting smiles while inwardly struggling. Yet deep inside, there remains an ache for more — a longing to feel truly known, valued, and deeply loved without condition.

God's love is the ultimate answer to this longing. It's the purest source of the love we crave. Human love is precious and vital, but when compared to God's love, it's only a glimpse of what's possible. His love can reach places in our hearts that no human affection ever could, healing and renewing us from the inside out.

We don't have to earn this love; we simply have to receive it and learn

to live in it. I have to continually remind myself of the unconditional love of God. I have to stop trying to find my worth and value in other people. I have to go back and remind myself of what God says about me and how He loves me. His love relentlessly pursues me, and it's here my heart finds rest from the hustle.

True love is not transactional, and that is not how our Heavenly Father loves. We are chosen because of who God is. I can live in the abundant place of knowing I am loved beyond measure, and I don't have to find myself begging others for scraps of love. I don't have to hustle to be loved; I already have every bit of the love my soul so desperately needs because of my Heavenly Father. Even if I had no one — even if my spouse doesn't love me, even if my children walk away, even if my friends all leave — any love I receive from others is just extra!

You already have all the love you need. The only thing that can fill the gaping hole in our hearts is the love of our Heavenly Father. He loves you. He wants you. He chooses you. He died for you. He saved you. It's all about Him, and if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you belong to Him. You are His, bought with a price, secured.

It must break His heart when we walk around so desperate for the love He is just waiting to lavish on us each and every day.

The Hustle Stops Here: Who are you looking to fill the hole? Who have you placed unreasonable expectations on to try to satisfy what you are so desperately longing for? Take time to pray through this today. Ask God for clarity on the answers to these questions, and then ask Him to shift your perspective — to lean more into Him than into others, to find true love where it was always meant to be found — in our Heavenly Father. Practice living loved today; embrace the truth that you are already fully known and deeply loved by God. Let that truth reshape how you approach your relationships and your daily life, knowing you are already enough.

DAY THIRTY

STOP BEING A CHAMELEON

BY KATE ALEXANDER

Read Hebrews 13:8

If you've ever been to the zoo with me, you know I do not like the reptile exhibit. Something about all those slimy creatures in a dimly lit room just freaks me out! One of those creepy crawlies is the chameleon. Yes, the ones who can blend into their surroundings and hide in any environment.

As much as I don't like being around these chameleons, I find myself relating to them in a deep way. My nature is to change color like I change my clothes, molding myself into the person I think will be accepted by the crowd I'm around. Green is the pull to be a "crunchy mama," never using any toxins around my baby, or else I'll be looked down upon by a whole new generation of mothers. Yellow is putting on a cheerful face because that's what pastors' wives do, despite the complexities I'm facing within. Red is showcasing my passion for justice on a plethora of topics without being too harsh, careful not to offend one side or the other. Purple is finding the balance between knowing my place in the kingdom of God and living in that royalty versus being a humble servant, aware that people will notice if an ounce of perceived pride swells up.

I think a lot of us struggle with this challenge: Finding consistency of character regardless of how others respond.

Hebrews 13:8 reminds us of the life Jesus modeled, a life of complete steadiness. In contrast to our shifting nature, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (ESV)." Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus was never concerned with the opinions of others. He never changed His colors to blend into the culture. In fact, He did everything to stand out. Jesus stood out among the religious leaders by presenting the scandalous truth that He was the Son of God, challenging the laws and practices they held so dear. He also stood out among sinners as being perfect and blameless.

This challenges us to discover who we really are in Christ — the authentic, bold, uncompromising selves we were created to be. How wildly convicting it is to know the unchanging God sees every time we choose approval over authenticity. Each time we change

our colors to blend into our environment — different at college than at church, one way with family and another with friends — we are grieving the Holy Spirit. Every time we choose to be a chameleon, we idolize popularity over being the person we are in Christ. We shape-shift to please people who hold no eternal value in our lives while often growing weary from trying to earn the favor of the God who holds our future in His hands.

So how do we achieve this consistency when it's so difficult to shake the need for approval? It starts with recognizing we can't fake it with God. No matter how much we try to hide who we really are, fearing rejection, God sees the truth. He knows us so intimately that even the most intricate facade shatters like glass before Him. If we can be our authentic selves with the Almighty, all-powerful, perfect God, why can't we maintain authenticity with imperfect people? This brings the perspective we so desperately need to overcome, the need for acceptance.

Are you tired of feeling like you have to change who you are to fit in? Are you so consumed with the opinions and approval of others that you're running yourself ragged trying to climb the ladder, gain followers, or change the world? Here's an important truth to remember: You will never be able to please everyone. Even the perfect Jesus had people who hated Him enough to kill Him. But you can find comfort knowing Jesus died and rose again so you can be fully known, loved, and accepted by the God who created you.

The Hustle Stops Here: What is one way you're hustling for approval from others right now? Do you find yourself becoming a chameleon rather than standing out like Jesus did? Take time to pray and allow God to change your heart and mind. Ask Him to remind you who you are in Him. Decide today that you will choose consistency in your character, even if it means losing friends or popularity. Remember God will provide the strength you need and bring new, supportive relationships into your life as you follow Him. Lay down your fear of rejection, knowing no matter what rejection you face, you can never lose the approval of God when you are in Christ Jesus.

DAY THIRTY-ONE

HE SEES YOUR HEART

BY JOSH EDLUND

Read 1 Samuel 16:7

Have you ever felt under appreciated and undervalued? Moments like these are common. This may be the case at your workplace, where you feel you are not fairly compensated for the effort you put in. It could be in your family, where you believe your children or spouse don't see all the sacrifices you make for them, or on a sports team where you don't receive the recognition for winning the game or making the big play.

We often look around on social media or in our personal lives and see others receiving the recognition we feel we deserve. We see our coworkers get the promotion or raise we wanted. We see someone else get credit for our work. We see others receiving the validation and congratulations we crave. We compare ourselves to those around us and wonder when it will be our turn to be celebrated.

In these times, we begin to ask ourselves difficult questions. Questions like: "Why don't people appreciate me?" "Don't they see how hard I am working?" "Does what I do even matter?" or "Should I just give up?"

We wrestle with these feelings of being unappreciated, unrecognized, and feeling the lack of thankfulness from others. We each respond differently to these emotions. Some of us strive harder for the attention we crave, hoping to find satisfaction. Some may lash out at a loved one, letting them know they have wronged us by not showing enough appreciation. Others may go silent and quietly decide to stop doing anything for those who don't seem to value us. We all respond in some way, but what is the correct response?

In 1 Samuel 16, we see what God appreciates. This is during the time of the prophet Samuel, nearing the end of King Saul's reign. God tells Samuel He has selected a new king to reign over Israel : David. At that time, David was a young, humble shepherd boy whom no one believed had the qualities to become king.

When God called Samuel, He made it clear His criteria for picking a king was radically different from human expectations. God said, "The Lord does not look at the things people look at." More importantly,

“the Lord looks at the heart.” God did not choose the person who hustled the hardest or positioned themselves best for the throne. He didn’t base His choice on achievements or appearances. Instead, God chose David because of his heart, his character, humility, and devotion to God.

This story teaches us God values what is often overlooked by people. It reminds us that hustling for accolades or recognition is not what truly matters. In those moments when we feel unseen, we can be comforted by knowing God sees beyond appearances; He sees our hearts.

In those moments when we feel like no one is watching, we must remember God sees all we do. When we feel passed over or under appreciated, God sees us and our hearts in those moments. He is our source of validation and joy in a way that human praise or recognition could never satisfy.

Human praise is often fleeting and conditional. It depends on our achievements, our outward appearances, or our ability to meet someone else’s expectations. One moment we may be celebrated, and the next forgotten. Human approval can be inconsistent, influenced by trends, emotions, and circumstances. But God’s love and recognition are constant and unconditional. He sees us at our best and our worst, yet His love never wavers. God’s recognition is not based on what we achieve but on who we are in Him. This assurance allows us to rest, knowing we do not have to endlessly strive for validation that fades away. Instead, we can find lasting joy in God’s unwavering love for us.

Ultimately, we do not need to chase the praise of others because we have a Father in Heaven who loves us and rewards our quiet faithfulness to Him.

The Hustle Stops Here: What is one thing you feel under appreciated for? Ask God to remind you He sees all that you do.

“Father, thank you for looking not just at my accomplishments but for loving me and seeing my heart. You are my source of joy and validation. Help me remember this today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

DAY THIRTY-TWO

CHASING BUBBLES: THE SHIFTING PRESSURE TO PLEASE PEOPLE BY PASTOR SHAWN CATALANO

Read Galatians 1:1-10

Do you remember being a kid, eyes wide with wonder, chasing bubbles across the yard? Someone would blow bubbles, and you'd sprint after them, laughter echoing through the air. When you finally caught one — POP — it vanished instantly under your fingertips. But you never paused; you'd turn, spot more bubbles drifting on the breeze, and the chase would begin all over again. It felt endless, yet exhilarating, as you laughed and lunged, determined to catch every last one. My kids could spend hours like this: entranced by the thrill, never tiring of the chase, always believing the next bubble would be even better.

While we'd like to think chasing bubbles is just for children, the truth is we never really stop. As adults, our bubbles just look different. Now, we call it people-pleasing. We tell ourselves we'd never waste our time chasing something so fleeting, but that's exactly what we do. We hustle for approval, validation, and acceptance, always thinking if we could just catch it, we'd be satisfied. But just like those childhood bubbles, when we think we have it, POP, it's gone. Instead of a burst of soap, it comes as a sarcastic comment, a harsh response, or a disapproving glance. And just like kids, we turn, spot another chance, and the chase begins all over again.

We follow this same pattern repeatedly: chasing what we can never truly obtain, chasing something that will never fulfill us, chasing what we were never meant to chase. We hustle for likes, chasing the approval of others instead of focusing on pleasing the Lord.

In Galatians 1, Paul warns us about the danger of focusing on pleasing people instead of the Lord. He writes this letter about a year after leaving Galatia, expressing shock and heartbreak that the very people he had just taught were now abandoning the true gospel. They were being swayed by false teachings, and Paul wasn't about to sugarcoat the truth just to keep people happy or to dodge tough conversations. He was unyielding. He would not compromise the gospel, no matter what it cost him.

Paul makes it crystal clear in verse 10: “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Paul’s message is blunt: We cannot live to please both people and God. Trying to do both is impossible and reveals divided loyalty. When we prioritize pleasing people, we push God from His rightful place in our lives and put ourselves at the center. Everything becomes about managing others’ perceptions, trying to control how they see us. We end up making ourselves the focus, and in doing so, we lose sight of God. We can’t make ourselves the center and still truly follow Jesus.

But there’s good news: God’s love for us is not based on how well we perform or how others perceive us. Ephesians 2:4-5 reminds us that God, “being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved.” Even when we were spiritually dead, God passionately pursued us in His abundant mercy and love. He brought us to life with Christ, saving us by His grace alone.

This grace is a powerful reminder of God’s unconditional love. God’s love for us, shown to us through His Son Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross, does not hinge on anything we have done, how well we are doing, or how anyone else sees us. His love comes from His own grace, shown through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. We don’t have to hustle for being liked by chasing for approval because in Christ, we already have all the love and acceptance we need. God sent His Son to die for us so we could experience eternal life with Him.

The Hustle Stops Here: Each day, start with a prayer, asking God to give you a mindset filled with His grace and His love. Ask Him to help you take each people-pleasing thought captive. Ask the Holy Spirit to replace that thought with a scripture or word that reminds you of who you are in Christ. Write those verses and words down so you’ll have them close by for when those thoughts inevitably pop up again.

Let’s stop chasing bubbles; let’s keep pursuing Jesus.

DAY THIRTY-THREE

RESTING IN GOD'S UNCHANGING LOVE

BY ADRIENNE LUGO

Read Romans 5:8

Our oldest daughter just started playing soccer this year. At 5, it looks more like follow the ball than it does organized sport, but she was determined to play. It all began when we attended a friend's son's soccer game last year, and she watched in awe. She turned to us and said, "Next season, can I play too?" Something sparked inside her.

As the season approached, we reminded her it was almost time to start, but just days before her first practice, doubt began to creep in. Her excitement for soccer soon turned into questioning, "Do I have to play?" and nervously sharing, "I don't think I want to play." The more we talked to her, it was evident the excitement for playing soccer was still there, but she was worried about not being good enough. "What if I'm not good? I don't even know how to play," she said, feeling the weight of needing to be perfect. She worried about gaining approval from us, her coach, and her friends. We reassured her soccer wasn't about being perfect, it was about learning, practicing, and having fun. We reminded her the coach was there to teach her and all she needed to do was try her best.

After having those conversations with her, I realized how, even from a young age, we can have a desire to strive for perfection, driven by a need for approval and validation. It's common for us to equate love with our ability to perform well or do the right things. We constantly seek reassurance through our accomplishments, whether it's grades, job titles, or even our children's behavior. Good behavior, success, and achievements are often rewarded with love or approval, while failure can bring rejection.

This mindset often creeps into our understanding of how God loves us. We hustle for approval, thinking we can win God's favor through our works. We believe we need to earn God's love through our good deeds, behavior, or devotion. Have you ever had thoughts like, "How could God love me now?" or "Maybe I need to try harder to be better so that God will accept me"? I know I have. This way of thinking puts a heavy burden on us, one that we were never meant to carry.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in

this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This verse is revolutionary because it shows us God’s love is not something we earn or deserve. In fact, it’s while we were at our worst God showed us the ultimate act of love. Christ went to the cross not because we were good enough, but because we weren’t. His love was never dependent on our performance. It was based on His grace and His desire to save us.

Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are sufficient, and they will always be enough. Understanding the truth that there’s nothing left for us to do to earn God’s love brings such freedom. We don’t have to hustle for perfection because God’s love and approval are secure. We can rest in the truth that God is satisfied with Christ’s payment, and nothing more is required from us.

The Hustle Stops Here: What happens after we rest in knowing God’s love isn’t based on our performance or transformed by how we have been living. Instead of trying to earn His love, we are invited to live in response to it.

Take time each day to remember you are loved by God not because of what you do but because of what Jesus has done. Let go of the pressure to perform or impress God. Rest in this grace that is already yours in Jesus.

As you experience God’s unconditional love, let it overflow to those around you. Love others not because of what they do for you, but because of the grace you’ve received. Be quick to forgive, and show the same kindness God has shown you.

In a world where love often feels like it has to be earned, the Gospel tells us a different story: God’s love for us is secure not because of anything we’ve done but because of everything Jesus has done. And that is a love worth resting in.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

THE APPROVAL TRAP

BY PASTOR MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Read John 5:44

One of the greatest deceptions we fall victim to is the lie that the approval of others (rooted in our own desperation for self-approval) is sufficient to satisfy us. The wounds caused by this lie fester, eventually becoming an infection that cripples our ability to see beyond ourselves. When we live within this deception, it creates a paradox: We crave the approval of others while simultaneously fearing their rejection. Ironically, our desire for others' approval reveals a weakness: our sense that we aren't worthy of being approved.

This was the downfall of the Pharisees in John 5. They were desperate for the approval of others to maintain their status as "elite religious leaders." In doing so, they disqualified themselves from the approval of the only One who truly mattered, the God they claimed to know so much about. They hustled for the applause of their peers but missed the eternal reward found in faith in Jesus.

Friends, this is the great deception that has taken hold of us, creating inner turmoil and confusion. As we live under this falsehood, it leads us deeper into a cavern of deception where we start to believe being liked gives us worth. Being liked means I am in control. Being liked is the same as being loved. Being liked is a cure for my anxiety and depression. Being liked matters more than doing what is right.

These lies, and many others, are what steal sleep from us at night. They cause us to obsess and overthink everything we say, do, or even consider. We don't take a step without contemplating the 10 different ways others might interpret it. This is a miserable way to live. It is not the life God intended for us, and certainly not the way He has called us to live. Yet, for many of us, this is our reality.

We often try to hide our desperation for approval under the guise of claiming we're just considering the needs of others. But the truth is, we don't do it for others at all. The root of this behavior is pride. When pride takes over, it seeks every possible way to receive validation, striving for the highest status achievable. If that means compromising our morals and the life Jesus died for and rose again to give us, then so be it. One of the biggest roadblocks to receiving life in Jesus is

pride. We were never designed to satisfy ourselves.

The hollow desire for the approval of others reveals a lack of faith in the God who sustains us. It leaves us with a daunting question: How can we truly believe in Jesus if we are seeking our own glory by being “liked” by others, instead of seeking to bring glory to God?

We become so consumed by the desire to be liked that we start to rely on our own strength, wisdom, and efforts, placing more trust in ourselves than in the God who created us and sustains us. This misplaced trust not only weakens our faith but prevents us from fully experiencing the peace and assurance that comes from relying on God alone.

So, how do we reconcile this? By turning away from the desire to be liked by others and turning instead to the One whose approval is not based on anything we have done, but entirely on what He did for us. The lies of the enemy are exposed through Jesus’ sacrificial love. Romans 3:25-26 declares Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for the punishment of our sins to justify us before God. Because of this, we don’t have to hustle for likes; we are already loved and approved by God through Jesus as we place our faith in Him! We no longer need to seek approval because we have been given ultimate approval through Jesus Christ!

The Hustle Stops Here: Have you fallen for the deception that the approval of others will satisfy you? What other lies are you believing about your need for approval? This is the moment when you can stop the lies of the enemy in their tracks and trade them for the promise of who you are in Jesus.

Prayer: “Father, I am sorry for all the times I have sought others’ approval over Yours. Today, I choose to rest in the truth of who I am in You, not because of anything I have done or can do, but because of what You did for me through Your Son Jesus.”

week six

THE HUSTLE TO FIX YOURSELF

MEMORY VERSE

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV

You’ve been there, caught in the endless cycle of trying to patch up your life, striving to be better, to do more, to somehow erase the guilt and shame you carry. But no matter how hard you work to fix yourself, it never seems to be enough. The hustle to do enough is draining, and the pressure to solve your own problems is overwhelming.

This week, you’ll see the hustle to fix yourself won’t bring real healing or wholeness. Jesus isn’t asking you to exhaust yourself by striving. He offers a different way, one that doesn’t start with self-improvement but with surrender. Through His death and resurrection, He gives you grace, forgiveness, and the chance to experience real freedom. He’s done all the work necessary for you to be made whole. It’s time to stop hustling to fix yourself and find rest in His finished work. Instead of relying on your strength, lean into the truth of His grace.

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

DITCH THE HUSTLE: EMBRACING GRACE OVER GRINDING

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Ever feel like you're running in circles, striving to be better but always falling short? We make promises to never repeat the same mistakes, to set big goals, give it our all, and then, bam, we're back to square one. Frustrated. Defeated. Sound familiar?

This cycle of "self-improvement" can be harmful. Why? Because the hustle to fix yourself is rooted in the lie that your value depends on how "good" you are. It tricks you into believing the more you do, the more you're loved, especially by God.

The hustle is rooted in shame. It whispers you're not praying enough, not godly enough, not enough period. You try to change, to be less angry, more kind, and when you stumble, that voice says, "God can't love or forgive you now."

Here's the danger: Your focus shifts from what God has done to what you do. It becomes all about your effort, flaws, and failures. Your relationship with God turns transactional: "If I do better, God will love me more." That's a trap. It fuels insecurity, piles on guilt, and distorts your view of who God really is.

So, what's the way out? Grace. Grace flips the self-improvement script. It says, "You're already loved. You're already accepted." Not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus did for you.

Ephesians 2:8-9 states: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." Did you catch that? It's not by works! Salvation isn't earned. It's a gift. Grace invites us to stop striving and start trusting.

But grace doesn't mean doing nothing. To live in grace is to live by faith. Grace and faith go together. Grace is God acting, and, by faith, we respond to what He's given. Grace resists earning, not effort. Grace doesn't excuse sin; it empowers us to strive by faith to become all God calls us to be. It's about trusting: trusting God is worth pursuing, trusting His love covers shame, His power gives

strength, and His grace equips us to walk in whom He created us to be. This is what makes grace hard to accept. It feels like surrender. It forces us to admit that what we are desperately hustling for can be received only as a gift. There is nothing we can do to make God love or accept us more.

When we hustle to fix ourselves, we either end up proud, thinking we're making progress on our own, or drowning in shame when we mess up. Pride says we don't need God; shame says He doesn't want us. Both push us further away. But grace? Grace says, "Stop the hustle. Come as you are. Rest in what I've done for you."

Grace shifts our focus from what we do to what Jesus has done. It gives us the freedom to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God, not because we're strong, but because we're loved. Grace isn't conditional; it's rooted in Jesus: His work, His character, His promises, and His unchanging love.

Grace drives you to stop trying and start trusting the God who began a good work in you will continue His work until it is finally complete when Christ Jesus returns (Philippians 1:6). Grace is God's love in action, establishing you in a living fellowship with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9), raising you from death to life (Ephesians 2:1-6), sealing you as His own through the gift of His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), empowering you to overcome by providing for every need (Hebrews 4:15), strengthening you to pursue Christ (2 Timothy 2:1), transforming you into Christ's image (2 Corinthians 3:18), and ultimately resurrecting your body in glory so you never experience death (Romans 8:30; 1 Corinthians 15:47-54).

The Hustle Stops Here: Are you exhausted from hustling to fix yourself? It's time to let go of striving and lean into trusting. Close your eyes, and simply say, "God, I surrender." Admit His grace is enough for you, right now, just as you are. Write down the areas where you've been striving, and then release each one to Him in prayer. Ask Him to fill those gaps where you've been struggling. Invite His grace into the broken places and let His love transform them. Whenever you feel the hustle, stop and remind yourself: It's not about what I can do; it's about what God has already done. Let Him take your failures, your weaknesses, and your brokenness. Declare Ephesians 2:8-9. Stop trying to prove yourself and start trusting you're already accepted, forgiven, redeemed, and secure in Christ!

DAY THIRTY-SIX

FROM FIXING TO TRUSTING

BY NICOLE BOLDMAN

Read John 9:1-25

I remember sitting in our pediatrician's office, surrounded by cold metal counter tops and framed pictures of zebras. I could hear my heart pounding. Moments later, my fears were confirmed: My sweet 3-year-old was diagnosed with autism.

In John 9:1-2, there is an encounter Jesus had: "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" I found myself asking the same question. What did I do wrong? Was it the wrong vitamins? Some kind of chemical exposure? A past sin or offense? Surely, this was my fault, and I needed to make it right.

The hustle to fix the autism began. I prayed, and I believed Jesus healed, but that wasn't enough. I read books, joined mom groups, changed his diet, signed him up for therapies, and believed if I did all those things, something would work. More effort would yield results.

If you read the whole story in John 9:1-25, you will find a similar dialogue. Jesus places mud on the blind man's eyes and sends him to wash in a pool, and he is healed. Those around start asking questions: Who healed him? Was he really blind? Who are his parents? I would have added, What kind of mud did he use? Where is the pool? Was there something special in the water?

Often, when we're faced with circumstances that are out of our control or that we simply do not understand, we look for something to fix...a stabilizing agent. If it's illness, maybe if you research enough, you can find a cure or ease a symptom. If it's a relational problem, maybe therapy, podcasts, and other people's opinions will fix the issues. Maybe you're depressed, so you recite positive affirmations and connect with nature to ground yourself. None of this is inherently bad. What becomes problematic is trusting in yourself rather than trusting in the Lord.

The hustle to fix the problem myself left me overwhelmed and exhausted for years. Nothing I did changed that my son was autistic. Behaviors improved, and we had amazing resources that helped,

but that was it. I had to make the choice to either trust in Jesus or not. Either God was good, no matter what, or He wasn't. He was good when my son had an awesome day, and He was good in the middle of a meltdown. Jesus was good when the speech therapist gave us a positive report, and Jesus was good when my son failed the evaluation again.

If you continue reading the story in John, you will find that after being questioned by a multitude of people, the blind man, in what sounds like frustration, replies, "Whether He is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see!" I love this statement, because the man can't really explain what happened to him. He knows something was wrong, and now it's not. For me, I remember what those early days felt like as a parent, but now the memories have been replaced with peace. I can't put my finger on the how, when, or what, but I know the Who. I know God is good, and I trust Him. And so can you.

My son is 18 now. He's the BEST, but I have no clue what his future will be like. I have to trust that Jesus does know, and He loves him deeply. He loves you deeply, too. No matter what you're going through, Jesus is worthy of your trust. The Bible tells us in Deuteronomy 1:8, "The Lord Himself goes before you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

In John 9:3, it says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Whatever you are going through, trust in the Lord. Let His works be displayed in you. Instead of exhausting yourself trying to control every outcome, take a step back and invite Jesus into the situation. Trust His plan is better, and rest in the knowledge that He is working for your good.

The Hustle Stops Here: Let me encourage you with a prayer: Lord, thank You that You promise to be with us through the darkest valleys. Today, we choose to trust You, and we lay every worry and anxiety at Your feet. Help us to choose You, every single day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

THE CROSS STOPS THE HUSTLE

BY MATTHEW RHOADS

Read Romans 5:12-21

Growing up, I always loved pulling weeds at my house. I don't know why, but it was almost therapeutic to sit outside in the Florida sun and make progress. The only frustrating — and sometimes overwhelming — thing about pulling weeds was it never seemed to end. I'd pull weeds from one area, and more would seem to miraculously appear the next day. Weeds can hide themselves just under the surface, and if you don't deal with the root of the problem, they're bound to grow back in just a matter of days.

Pulling weeds is a lot like trying to fix our own brokenness. There have been times in my life when I tried to fix something about myself, but I only did it at a surface level. I tried, in my own strength, to break a habit, free myself from sin, or write my own plan for my life. Every time I hustled to fix myself, I failed. Just when I thought I had it figured out, another weed would pop up. No matter how hard I worked, I couldn't fix my own brokenness. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you've bought into the mindset that says, "If you work hard enough, save enough, go to enough counseling, pray harder, or do enough good deeds, then you can fix your brokenness."

But Romans 5:12-21 teaches us the futility of that mindset. Ever since Adam first sinned, there has been an unfixable gap between us and God: a debt we couldn't pay, a brokenness we can't repair. We make attempt after attempt to bridge the gap, but nothing truly works. We may think we can pull all the weeds out of our lives, but as long as we keep trying on our own, more will appear. We end up in a cycle of brokenness and helplessness, wondering how we can fix ourselves and repay this debt we owe.

The good news is God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross in our place, to bridge the gap and pay the debt we could never repay. What really changed on the cross? Yes, Jesus died, but something far deeper happened that allowed us to find freedom. As sinners, we were left with a debt we couldn't pay because we failed to live up to God's perfect standards. On our own, we helplessly tried to fix our brokenness. But on the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, fully

God and fully man, died for us. He faced all the brokenness we do, yet remained without sin. The perfect Son of God took our place. As Jesus hung on the cross, God the Father turned away from Him. In that moment of darkness, Jesus took on the full weight of our sin and brokenness. Though He never sinned, He endured the punishment we deserved. Every sin and imperfection we would ever strive to fix He bore on the cross.

What was once a legal debt we owed is now erased because of Jesus' finished work. For those who trust in Jesus, we no longer have to fear God. Instead of fear, we experience grace and acceptance. We no longer have to hustle to fix ourselves. The work is already done! On the cross, Jesus secured complete forgiveness for us, one that isn't dependent on us fixing ourselves. On the cross, Jesus suffered and died so we could claim His perfection as our own.

Let go of the guilt and shame that weigh you down. Jesus has already paid the ultimate price for your redemption once and for all. His sacrifice covers every mistake and failure, past, present, and future. You don't need to hustle to fix yourself or prove yourself worthy. Instead, rest in the truth that Jesus' grace is not only sufficient but overflowing. His love is more powerful than any of your shortcomings, and His work on the cross has set you free completely and forever.

The Hustle Stops Here: Take some time to reflect on what Jesus' death accomplished for you. Just as I felt overwhelmed by the endless cycle of pulling weeds, striving to fix ourselves leaves us feeling trapped in our imperfections. The writer of Romans clearly states while sin entered the world through Adam, the free gift of grace and forgiveness Jesus secured for us on the cross allows us to walk in freedom. You will never experience true freedom until you stop trying to earn forgiveness and start trusting that Jesus' work on the cross is enough. The cross stops the hustle to fix yourself and offers you true freedom.

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

MOWING FORWARD AND NOT LOOKING BACK

BY KIMBERLY MAPLES

Read Luke 9:62

When we fall short, it's easy to believe we need to work harder to make up for our mistakes. I came to Christ at 36, after years of living for myself and carrying the heavy burden of sin. I entered my relationship with Jesus weighed down by more baggage than I could bear, overwhelmed by guilt.

Through the gospel, I discovered the beauty of Jesus' offer of complete forgiveness not based on my efforts, but on His finished work on the cross. His forgiveness is full and final, covering all my past, present, and future failures. I desperately needed this in my life, yet I was convinced my past was too much for Jesus to forgive and I needed to earn His forgiveness. I thought I could make up for 36 years of sin through hard work and dedication.

I created a checklist of tasks, serving, leading, helping wherever I could, hoping to please God and relieve my guilt. Although these actions brought me joy, and I believed they pleased God, the guilt remained.

As I explored deeper into God's Word, it began to click. In Luke 9:62, Jesus says, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Jesus is highlighting the importance of total commitment to following Him.

My husband and I live on 3 acres, and there is a lot of mowing. When we first moved in, I learned how to drive the zero-turn mower so I could mow while he did all the weed eating, edging, and blowing. In my struggle to make straight lines, I kept looking back to ensure I wasn't leaving a patch of grass and that my tire marks were lining up right. But looking back caused me to lose focus on where I was going, and I ended up making such a mess that my husband had to completely re-mow the yard.

In a spiritual sense, Jesus said anyone who decides to follow Him must do so with undivided attention and commitment. Looking back, whether at past sins, regrets, or worldly attachments, can distract a person from their journey of faith. It hinders spiritual progress, just like I was distracted while mowing the grass.

This verse challenges all believers to let go of their past and fully embrace the life ahead. It's about moving forward with a focused drive on the kingdom of God and not allowing the past to hold us back.

Once I was able to take my past sin and shame out of the equation, everything began to change. By releasing the burden of my past and stopping my attempts to earn forgiveness, I could finally live in the freedom of Christ's complete forgiveness. No longer was I weighed down by the constant need to make up for my mistakes or prove myself worthy of His grace. Instead, I could rest in the truth that Jesus had already done the work for me on the cross.

This newfound freedom allowed me to experience a profound sense of joy and peace I had never known before. As a result, I grew closer to God. I was able to serve, lead, and love others, not out of a sense of obligation but out of genuine gratitude and a desire to reflect the love and forgiveness I had received. My relationship with Jesus deepened as I learned to trust Him more fully, knowing my past no longer defined me. My focus shifted from trying to earn forgiveness to simply walking in the grace that had been freely given to me.

In this freedom, I discovered the joy of living a life fully committed to Christ, not hindered by what was behind me but driven by the hope and purpose found in Him. It was a transformation that could only come from embracing the completeness of His forgiveness and trusting that His grace was sufficient for all my failures.

The Hustle Stops Here: Reflect on a moment in your past that continues to burden you with shame or guilt, something you find difficult to release. Bring this memory to God and sincerely ask for His forgiveness. Recognize God's grace is sufficient and His love is boundless. Embrace the freedom He offers and trust in His promise to make all things new. Allow His mercy to wash over you, healing the wounds of your past and renewing your spirit. Remember, His forgiveness is complete and unwavering; you are no longer bound by your past mistakes.

DAY THIRTY-NINE

A GIFT FREELY GIVEN

BY HANNAH PECK

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Have you ever caught yourself trying to earn or deserve gifts? Growing up, any gift I received from my dad was a gift I had to earn. Whether it was through good grades, completing tasks, or getting awards: gifts, love, and acceptance were based on my performance.

Many of us, myself included, project this mindset of earning onto our relationship with the Lord. We believe if we just work hard enough, if we just do the right things, if we're perfect enough, then we will earn God's love, and our salvation will be secure.

Yet, God's Word offers us a truth very different from what we might think. Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to the church in Ephesus to share many doctrinal teachings, one of which is that salvation is not earned but given through grace, God's unmerited favor.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

Paul tells us it's not our own works or our own doing that has earned us salvation, but it is a freely given gift by God that we could never earn.

This misunderstanding of salvation by works can lead us into several dangerous pitfalls:

- 1. Frustration and Burnout:** When we try to earn what's already been freely given to us, we live a life full of frustration and burnout. We see God not as a good Father who loves us, but as a Father who loves conditionally and turns His back on us when we fail. We don't do good works out of love but out of obligation and fear.
- 2. Diminishing the Cross:** We forget how desperately we need a Savior. When we think we can earn salvation, we diminish the sacrifice of what Jesus did for us on the cross. When we hustle to earn what He has freely given, we distort the beauty of His gift.
- 3. Pride and Comparison:** We become prideful and boastful of what we accomplish and start to see

ourselves as more deserving of salvation than others.
We compare ourselves to others and barter with God
on why we deserve an eternity in Heaven over them.

But praise God that salvation isn't based on what we deserve or what we could earn. No matter how hard we hustle, work, or try, we would always fall short of perfect; that's why we need a perfect Savior, Jesus. Understanding this allows us to rest in what Christ has accomplished for us and be immensely grateful for God's goodness.

Paul goes on to tell us that even though good works won't earn us our salvation, we are still called to do good works for Christ's sake! We should be spurred on to do good deeds, not out of obligation or fear, but from an overwhelming sense of gratitude and awe of God's love for us.

This truth is reflected in a poem by Jon Acuff. He writes: "It is finished. May those words land on your bones for the nights when fear tells you the cross was a beginning & you must finish grace." Jesus' sacrifice was complete. Grace is not something we work to finish; it is already fully accomplished by Christ.

I pray today you rest in the fact that God wants to spend eternity with you simply because you are His child. There is nothing you must accomplish to earn His freely given gift.

The Hustle Stops Here: Today, take a step back and ask yourself where you are trying to earn God's love or approval. Challenge yourself to release those areas to God, trusting His grace is enough. Spend time in prayer, thanking Him that He has already done all that is needed for your salvation. Reflect on His goodness and let go of the need to hustle for something He has freely given.

"Heavenly Father, thank You for knowing me, loving me deeply, and caring for every detail of my life. Today, I release my need to earn or deserve Your love. Help me to rest in Your grace. Lord, let me find peace in knowing I am Your child and nothing I do can earn what You have already given freely. May I fully embrace Your love today and always, resting in what You have done for me."

DAY FORTY

IT REALLY IS FINISHED!

BY PASTOR JAMES HILTON

Read John 19:16-30

Let's clear the air: We all struggle and mess up. No one's perfect, and it's not a matter of if you'll fail, it's how do you respond when you blow it. Do you double down, hustling to patch up the mess and fix yourself? Spoiler alert: It never ends well.

Instead, there's a different kind of faith, one that helps us face our worst failures without drowning in despair. It's not about fixing ourselves but about getting back up, knowing we're still loved, valued, and held by God's grace.

That's why Good Friday is so good. It's a powerful reminder that we don't have to live like that anymore. As Jesus hung on the cross, He didn't let His final breath pass without purpose. He chose His last words carefully. These words would echo through eternity and change how we see our worth and efforts. He cried out, "Tetelestai," or "It is finished (John 19:30)!"

"Tetelestai" is more than just saying "it's over." It's a declaration of completion, a promise that the work needed for our healing and redemption is already done. Back in Jesus' time, "tetelestai" was stamped on receipts to show a debt had been fully paid. When Jesus used that word, He proclaimed that our spiritual debt — our sin, our striving, our endless hustle — had been settled.

Our endless efforts to earn worth, fix our brokenness, and prove we're good enough ... none of it adds to what Jesus has already finished. Jesus invites those tired of the hustle to truly rest. Let's explore what His "it is finished" really means for us today:

1. Forgiveness: The End of Guilt and Shame

Ever tried to make up for something you did wrong, only to feel like it's never enough? Jesus ended that cycle. His death on the cross wiped out our past, present, and future sins. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." He took all our guilt and shame and buried them with Him. We don't have to hustle to prove we're not "that person." We're forgiven, fully and completely.

2. Reconciliation: The End of Earning God's Approval

Feel like you have to earn God's favor? Maybe if you pray a little more, serve a little harder, God will finally be pleased? Jesus' death ended that striving. Colossians 1:21–22 tells us we were once far away from God, but through Jesus' sacrifice, we are now presented as holy and blameless. There's nothing you can do to make God love you more or less. No more hustling to earn His love. It's already yours.

3. Redemption: The End of Brokenness

We've all felt broken, whether from our own choices or from things beyond our control. We often try to piece ourselves back together, believing if we just work hard enough, we can make everything right. But no matter how we try, we can't fully fix our brokenness. Redemption means Jesus did what we never could. Romans 3:23–24 says we've all fallen short, but we're justified by His grace through Christ's redemption. It's more than forgiveness; it's restoration. Jesus took on our failures and transformed them into something whole. We don't have to hustle to make ourselves complete; Jesus already did it.

4. Victory: The End of Defeat

Life can feel like a series of battles; some we win, some we lose. But Jesus' victory on the cross means we don't have to live in defeat anymore. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37)." We're fighting from a place of victory, not for it. Sin, shame, and death have been conquered. So let's rest in that. The work's been done.

The Hustle Stops Here: When Jesus said, "It is finished," He meant it. You no longer have to strive for worth, approval, or healing. It's all been secured by His sacrifice. He's completed the work so we can live in peace, rest, and freedom. There's no more debt to pay, no more worth to prove, and no more forgiveness to chase.

Take a moment to reflect on what you've been hustling to achieve during these 40 days, whether it's identity, self-worth, security, success, fulfillment, acceptance, healing, or anything else God brings to mind. Cross each one out and write "Tetelestai" over it. Then take some time to thank God that it's finished through Jesus.

There's nothing left to earn or fix; He's done it all. The hustle ends at the cross. True healing, true rest, and true freedom are found in His grace. It really is finished.

FINAL WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

At Journey Church, our mission is clear, we want to help you connect with Christ, build community, and step into your divine calling. This devotional was created with that very purpose in mind, and we are so grateful to have walked this 40-day journey with you. Jesus invites anyone tired of hustling to start trusting in what He has already accomplished for you. You can drop the weight of proving yourself and embracing the freedom only God provides. My prayer is that these readings have brought you closer to God, deepened your love for Him, and reignited your passion to follow Jesus.

As you move forward, continue to build a daily rhythm of spending time with God. These intentional moments lead to spiritual transformation and lasting intimacy with Him. To help, we recommend free devotional resources like RightNow Media and the YouVersion App, which fit into any schedule. Dive deeper, grow closer, and discover the joy of knowing Jesus Christ more each day. If you have questions about your faith or need guidance, our Journey Church Location Pastors are here for you. Reach out to us at info@journeyconnect.org—you're not alone.

Thank you to everyone who made this devotional possible. Your gifts and dedication have empowered others to take bold steps of faith. Special thanks to Sandy Moran and Hannah Peck for their thoughtful editing and to the Hoffmans for generously providing an amazing space for inspiration. Your efforts have blessed so many.

Let's live out the freedom we've found in Christ and step confidently into the life He's designed for us.

In Christ,

Pastor James Hilton

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REFERENCES

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- Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality by David Benner
- The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery by David Benner
- Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God by Francis Chan
- The Explicit Gospel by Matt Chandler
- Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No To Take Control of Your Life by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
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- Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters by Timothy Keller
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